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Better Yarn



Arthur Greening

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THE BETTER YARN



THE MONKS' MERRY MOMENT.

THE BETTER YARN

BEING SOME CHRONICLES OF
THE MERRYTHOUGHT CLUB



RETOLD BY

ARTHUR GREENING

CHARACTER SKETCHES BY
CLIVE GARDINER

FRONTISPIECE, &C., BY
ALBERT LOCK

JARROLD'S
PUBLISHERS (LONDON)
LIMITED

First published August 1919

DEDICATED
TO
OLD "PALS"
OF BOHEMIAN DAYS
AND
BAGHDAD NIGHTS
WHEN
MOST OF THESE TALES
WERE TOLD
AND WE ALL TRIED
TO SPIN A
"BETTER YARN"

A. G.

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A FEW WORDS BY WAY OF PREFACE

My merry masters! First let me say that I make no excuse for publishing this book, for verily a book of humour wants no apologia in these days of general curtailment, and it is because I fear the shortage of humour that I hasten to help the world to laughter.

You will say—and I heartily agree with you—that it is as dangerous to put old jokes in new books as new wine in old bottles, and yet when I contend that there is nothing new under the sun you will dismiss your criticisms and laugh again at the story you heard your father tell your mother when some decades ago you were at her knee.

This little work has another excuse—and again I affirm that no excuses are necessary, that is why I am making them—that I have traced these ancient stories to their fount,

that I have, in truth, come across the Grail of Humour in this old inn, frequented by those monks who found the making of jokes for the world as useful as prayers.

Just as they laughed, so I hope you will laugh—nay, I expect more from you, for these pieces of wit have attained an added flavour in their maturing, and it is the finished article that I present to you.

I have myself ever loved a good story. To me those who cannot laugh at a story are people who are deceitful in their habits, for humour is one of the greatest assets of an age made sadly dull by evil circumstances and a gigantic war.

People who lack the gift of wit would rob the poor or slander their neighbour. They move in darkness, and at the end, darkness is their portion. A laugh may save a kingdom, where a frown would lose it. Those Germans were ever dull fellows, and look to what a pass their lack of laughter has brought them.

I would especially recommend this little volume to the numerous Controllers of Govern-

ment Departments, those who have a habit of writing of scandals in the Daily Press, the grey-visaged clergy and the Mrs. Grundies of our time, for, believe me, my readers, they are your enemies. These are the people who make you sign forms, sing psalms, or break off your engagement. They are nasty people, seeing no fun in life and suffering from defective digestive organs. They breathe heavily in their sleep, and leave their money to Charity when they die. With these have no part, for you will come to no good by them. They kill no fatted calf when you return to the fold, and invariably their sons either become clergymen or their daughters go on the music-hall stage without talent.

Your friend should be this book, for a laugh will oftentimes do you more good than a dose of medicine, and two laughs may stave off appendicitis.

If ever you meet a tedious individual who wishes to convert you to some new doctrine—give him this book, and if he fails to laugh pass him by. He has a nasty humour and

might break out at any moment. Before taking any drastic step in life consult this book, it may guide you, and anyhow you will go to your new employer with a laughing face, and he will be pleased, for he probably will be a man of happy habits and no pharisee.

With these few words let me leave my little work in your hands, for you not only to be the judge but the jury as well. I have no hesitation in affirming that you are a nice fellow and at once one of my friends, for otherwise you would not have paid me the great compliment of purchasing my jokes.

In fact, I like you most sincerely, and to you I bequeath this volume with a genuine hope that it may make you happier than you are at present.

Let me say that I endeavour to retell the stories continued in this little volume as nearly as possible as they were told to me, and I desire to hereby make all due acknowledgments to from whatever source they may have been culled.

Before "getting on with it" I desire to

acknowledge the assistance of my old friends, Draycot M. Dell and Herbert E. Addy, in the gathering of yarns and the general planning and preparation of this little book. Dell in particular must be blamed for the verses which I only suggested but couldn't write. I think they improve the book, giving it that variety which is said to be the essence of interest.

ARTHUR GREENING.

MONK'S COTTAGE,
MONK'S RISBOROUGH,
BUCKS.



THE MERRYTHOUGHT INN.

TO INTRODUCE OUR CHARACTERS

To my mind no book is thoroughly complete unless its reader is on an understanding basis with the characters he is meeting between its pages.

It is good for you to know your fellow-man, and here you will meet him. He is not an extraordinary individual, no François Villon or Dubosc, Sidney Carton or Svengali.

My, or should I say "Our," chief characters are not so far away from our general comprehension as all that. They do no wonderful acts of either heroism or mystery, they are neither poetic "crooks" nor unfathomable degenerates. As a matter of fact, reader, they are you and myself, they step upon the same stage, bow to the same audience, and drink and eat the same rationed articles, and, let me whisper it gently, no doubt they have stood a drink

during war-time or had a meat meal without coupons—such is their genial and very human nature.

To write a successful book these days one really has to find some great, some sweetly reasonable genius to preface it for you. You put the O.B.E. before the Deputy-Assistant-Controller's Under-Secretary's name instead of after, as it were, the cart before the horse, and in like quaintness you only read the preface—the book itself is a detail.

Now there was no great man to usher my little gathering into the literary world, so I took the bull by the horns and fancied that a little word about them from my faithful but uninspired pen might bridge the difference between your ignorance and knowledge of these really entertaining characters.

Happy indeed is the man who is permitted to write his own preface, but happier far if he may be permitted to put his readers into contact at once with those who will regale—I hope—a tedious hour.

If you like you can lay the book down when

you have read my preface and this little introduction. As a matter of fact, I expect that as it is but poor stuff indeed, and you may say to yourself, if this is the prelude God preserve us from the Grand Finale.

Perhaps you will say that a real humorist should have written these few lines—George Bernard Shaw or Sir James Barrie or George Robey, but knowing as I full well do my own insignificance I left well alone, and, burning my boats behind me, swam the Hellespont.

Now, imagine, reader, that you are standing in my old country inn, "The Merrythought." It is evening, and already in the little windows down the village street the pilgrim lamps are beginning to let their light shine.

Have a look about the place, at the old stone corridors, with the tap-room on the right. Here you will find the cork dart circle and the villagers; the ham drying in this fruity atmosphere, and the old tables that date back so many centuries. A little further down the passage is the room where these stories were told. This is a bar-parlour containing old

pictures and a long table, the chairs around which are dedicated to separate customers in very much the same manner as a parson touts his pews. Here on the shelves are the choice viands of many countries and old glasses of other ages as well as pewter. A cheery fire blazes. This then the scene, and here you are.

You are waiting for mine host or his good wife to come in and serve you with half a pint of the best, or a splash of something that never did any one any harm, when there comes to your ears the sound of approaching footsteps.

You step forward as a man enters.

“Reader—McAndrew.”

You shake the Scotsman’s hand, and in the manner of man meeting man have a look at the newcomer.

He is tall, thin, and has the high cheekbones that tell of a nation that biting on the bullet pushed its jaws so high that there they remained as an evidence of dogged determination, carefulness, and pugnacity.

To proceed.

He bows.

You bow.

His eyes are smiling at you, and as you grip his rugged paw you know he is a good fellow. There is laughter in his face and a sixpence in his hand—the other hand.

But wait whilst I introduce you to the second visitor. What a contrast! Here we have a broad-faced, ruddy-complexioned giant, with a rich brogue in his voice and a hole in his pocket.

This is Terence; and next comes his friend Izzy.

Izzy needs no explaining.

His nose is in itself the punishment and the crime they both fit. He is also a man full of laughter, and gold. He has that suave manner that encourages a careful friendship. You are both careful: Izzy that you shan't do him, and you that you shan't be done by Izzy. But I expect you will be.

Then there enters a tall, stout figure. His face is just as fat as the rest of his person. This is Garge—Garge who shakes like a mountain when he laughs and has the heart of the

giant he is ; Garge who loves a joke even if it takes him time to see it.

Garge is of the soil, and you know it. Izzy is of the city, and so is McAndrew ; whilst Terence is from everywhere—the typical Irishman with a fund of humour as rich as the Bank of England, and a nature just as golden, even if he does think that the Sassenach has robbed his country of its birthright.

Not only these, my readers, must you meet, but here comes a Lancashire man, a commercial traveller, a soldier, and a sailor ; indeed, that glad, grand gathering of the world of men.

Here we have no use for the kill-joy, the prude or the snob, for this is the little house of Freedom on the Upland road to temporary happiness, where the hour can be wiled away in good fellowship and the dawn brought in with a laugh.

You will meet many others, but, like the journalistic phrase, they are too numerous to mention. Sufficient it is that you should be properly introduced to those with whom you are to hold communion.

Of the old monks there are none to whom I may introduce you, for they are only spirits. But I would stimulate your imagination even as to these, and point you out their latter-day brethren—the good old parson who loves a joke and a glass of wine, the jolly rector, or the tripping curate who can tell one with the best.

Now let me leave you, for you must think me a tedious fellow. Read on, my friend, and with these newly acquired comrades take your full enjoyment.



"Gorge"

THE BETTER YARN

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST MERRY MOMENT

Here you'll find laughter fit to bring
Hope to the heart and health to a king.

JOHN SMITH, 1918.

THERE was a wealth of cheer abroad in the old parlour of the Merrythought Inn that night, ripples of laughter were echoing about the room as some one of its occupants threw a stone of humour into the Pool of Jollity, so that the vibrations grew and grew and the merry nature of the atmosphere increased.

There would be no completeness about the opening part of this book without some reference to the scene of these jokers who will soon

step before you in the most joyous procession of laughs, quips, sallies, and jests as ever made a king laugh or a bishop chuckle just as he was about to intone the *Nunc Dimittis*.

The Merrythought Inn took its name originally from the fact that it was built on the site of an old monastery, whose occupants were the veriest lot of quipsters that ever lived.

These old monks thought nothing of staying up all night and yarning over the old wines that the monastery cellars contained, and their reputation had so passed down the years that when in the course of time the building was as much a ruin as their reputation, it was decided to erect a hostelry on the site by way of a merrythought and a memorial to those old jokers who lay chuckling in their graves in the nearby cemetery.

Thus the Merrythought Inn came into being, and the souls of many an ancient monk and chuckling prior brought a sense of humour into the spirit of the inn, so that everything was laughter and goodfellowship—two things that the customers took in with their beer

with as much avidity as a thirsty baby—drinks a glass of water on a summer day!

The old inn stood just at the end of a little country town at the junction of two roads, so that you could stop there for a drink going out or have the last one there coming into the tiny town.

Time had dealt kindly with the old place, and there was a wealth of generous atmosphere in the old bar parlour, with the old oaken seats in the chimney-corner and the great beams that supported the roof.

All through the Merrythought Inn was grounded with cobble-stones, and the hanging lamps still kept alive the half-light that had been one of the features of the monastery when the old monks found it difficult to hold their sides and the wall as well as they went unsteadily to bed.

The roof of the inn was very low, just as the façade was high, the old roof stretching down at an acute angle at the rear of the inn so that you could touch it with a lifted hand.

The old sign, said to have been painted by Morland, still swung to and fro in the winter

winds, or just creaked when the summery zephyrs stirred it to the memory of the past.

What jokes it had heard—what sights had that old sign seen! Many a merry procession of ghostly monks who used, just before closing time, to come from where they slept so sound to revive old times and old memories with a rollicking story that trickled through the half-opened window of the bar parlour to bring a whiff of good brandy with it.

The old sign would hear remarks from these seniors of the night such as, "That's a good one," "Well, I never," "Oh, my poor sides," and "That reminds me!" and he would hear ghostly chuckles and sometimes a story told in the Latin tongue that he could not understand, but which was evidently very amusing, for the night would be full of laughter afterwards.

We call the sign "He," as it would never have done for it to be the feminine gender with those old monks hovering about.

Let us leave the night, though, and the monks and the sign, and come back to where McAndrew

the Scot, Izzy the Jew, Garge of the village, and Terence of County Clare are negotiating the cup that cheers about the rough wooden table of the old parlour.

It was Izzy of this little group who spoke first, Izzy with the reminiscent nose and the twinkling brown eyes.

“Have you heard this one?” he remarked casually, as he called for another pint and finished Garge’s bitter.

The others shook their heads.

“Well,” began Izzy, “Moses was teaching his little son the commercial value of fires, bankruptcies, failures, and such-like commodities, provided they were organized with real care and circumspection. Presently the young hopeful bleated out—

“‘Farder, marriage is a failure, ain’t it?’

“The old man stroked his beard,” continued Izzy, smiling at Garge, who had just discovered the loss of his drink.

“‘Vell, my son,’ replied young Moses’ father, ‘if von marries a voman with lots of monish, it’s dam nearly as goot as a failure!’”

Garge lost himself in laughter as Terence leant forward.

“Shure,” he said, “but that is a moighty fine story of yours, Izzy. Have you ever heard tell, though, of the Oirishman who was met by a motorist in my own county of Clare? The countryman was taking some geese to market, and when the motorist asked what price he would get for the birds the counthryman said—

“An’ it plaze yer honour, five shilling a-piece.’ ”

“The motorist looked surprised.

“‘If you took those to London,’ ” he replied, ‘you would get quite fifteen shillings each.’ ”

“The Oirishman laughed.

“‘Shure and begorrah,’ he replied, ‘if I had the Lakes o’ Killarney in Hell I could sell them at a pound a pint.’ ”

The bar-parlour of the Merrythought Inn was well under way now.

Again it was Izzy’s turn.

"Ikey had taken his wife and baby to the play," he began, "but no sooner had the curtain rung up on the first act than the child began to cry lustily. Up came an attendant.

"'Unless you keep that chield quiet,' he said gruffly, 'you will have to go!'

"'That's all very well, ma tear,' was Ikey's reply, 'but vat about de money I haf paid for my seats?'

"'That will be returned to you at the box-office,' answered the attendant.

"About half-way through Act II Ikey might have been overheard whispering to his spouse—

"'I say, Rebecca, I've seen enough of this play. Pinch Reuben, and we'll get our rhino back.'"

A laugh from McAndrew, who, seeing that the eyes of the others were on him, decided that it was his turn to tell a yarn.

"I was in a Scottish village," he said, "and there lived there a fellow who was known to be the 'innocent' of the neighbourhood. He was the village fool. People used to offer

him the choice of a silver piece and a copper penny, and it was noticed that the fool always took the big coin in preference to the one three times its value. I tried it myself one day, and when he had taken the penny I turned to him.

“ ‘Sandy,’ says I, ‘do you know the difference in value that it’s always the penny you take?’ ”

“ ‘Aye, fine, I ken the difference,’ came the fool’s answer, ‘but if I took the silver piece they wad never try me again.’ ”

“A true Scot,” said Terence, when the laughter had subsided. “It reminds me of the Kiltie who tried his grip at one of those grip-testing machines, where if you grip hard enough you get your money back. Well, the Kiltie tried his grip one evening, and they found him dead by the machine in the morning.”

“I nearly died from starvation once in Glasgow,” said Izzy, with unhappy recollections hovering in his eyes.

“ ‘There was a priest once,’ said Terence, not taking any notice of Izzy, “ ‘who having given a glass of whisky to a carman who was feeling a bit ill, said to that worthy—

“ ‘How do you feel now? Didn’t that make another man of you?’

“ ‘Bedad, it did, your raverence,’ came the reply, and the carman added significantly, ‘and the other man would like a glass too.’ ”

It was Izzy’s turn, and leaning forward he addressed the company—

“ ‘A Jew, visiting a tradesman who was also a Jew,’ he began, “ ‘suddenly noticed his friend’s brand-new shop blind.

“ ‘Vy, Ike, my boy,’ he remarked, ‘how came you by dis?’

“ ‘Vell, my customers paid for it,’ replied Ike.

“ ‘Your customers?’

“ ‘Yeth; you see I put a box on my counter marked “For the Blind.” ’ ”

The cleverness of this ruse was much appre-

ciated by all those present, and they looked to McAndrew to cap it.

Mac smiled. "A humane sportsman," he said, "noticed that his gamekeeper attendant suffered from cold ears. So the first opportunity he purchased a pair of ear-muffs and gave them to him.

"Some months after they were out on the moors again together, and the sportsman noticed that the gillie was not wearing the ear-muffs.

" 'What's the matter, Archie,' he said, 'that you don't wear your ear-muffs?'

" 'Weel, sir,' replied the gillie, 'ae day a mon asked me to tak a glass of whisky an' I didna hear him, so I have never worn the muffs since.' "

Terence was smiling broadly. "Shure," he said, "but that is a good story. Have you heard this now? "

"Two Irish labourers having had a quarrel, decided to fight it out. They asked their overseer to be referee, and he consented on condition that the first one who had had enough

should call out 'Enough,' and the other be considered victor.

"The fight began, and went on until the men were half-dead. Then one called out 'Enough.'

" 'Be jabbers,' gasped the other, 'Oi've been trying to think of that word for the last half-hour.' "

The story was so typically Irish that the laughter that followed was general. At that moment there entered the bar a soldier; he had a whimsical look in his eyes, and having ordered a pint of bitter he turned to the assembled company.

"This is a good story," he said, "and one in which I played a part.

"We were about to try a surprise attack on the Huns, and our young officer, not too well acquainted with the terrain, had secured the services of a guide. In a very low, very subdued, very hoarse whisper the man said—

" 'Are you ready, sir? ' "

" 'Yes,' answered the officer.

“He gave a command, and the little group of shadowy men slowly merged into and became part of the darkness. They had marched a considerable distance when the guide touched the officer and whispered—

“‘Shell-hole on the left.’

“‘Shell-hole on the left’ was whispered from one to another down the length of the line. Another long tramp and then ‘Barbed wire on the right.’ This information was communicated in a similar way. They continued tramping. No one spoke, except for an occasional warning as to the trail by the low-voiced guide. The officer calculated they must be getting on for two miles. He drew the guide’s attention, and in his turn whispered—

“‘How far are we now from the German trenches?’

“‘About three miles and a half,’ whispered the guide.

“‘Three miles and a half? Then what the —— are we whispering like this for?’

“‘You needn’t whisper if you don’t want

to, sir,' replied the man. '*I've got a sore throat.*' "

After the laughter had subsided the soldier leant forward. "I was the guide," he said whimsically.

For a moment the joking ceased and the conversation turned on the subject of tact. McAndrew expressed the opinion that it was a virtue mainly owned by his race, but a Cockney, who had come unnoticed into the room a few moments before, disagreed with him.

"Tact," he said, "is common to all of us, and here is a good example I came across. Two workmen were once talking together, one a labourer and the other a plumber, on this subject.

" 'What I wants to know,' asked the labourer, 'is what the dickens they means by tact?'

" 'Don't yer know?' replied the plumber; 'it's like this, Bert. I once 'ad a little job to do in one of them 'ouses around Tooting. The maid she opens the door to me and tells me to git on with it upstairs. So upstairs I

goes, and inter the bathroom, and lumme if there wasn't a lady there in the suit she was born in a-sitting in the bath. Lots of people would 'ave stopped and stared, but not me. I says, "I beg yer pardon, *sir*," and 'ops out quick and shuts the door. Now that's what tact is. Do yer understand now ?'

"Them two," continued the Cockney, whose name was Rabbits, "were men just the sime as myself, and I can tell yer we're not only tactful but cute as well. This proves it.

"Among the passengers in a Paddington omnibus was a small but sharp-looking boy of five. As the omnibus was quite full one of the gentlemen obligingly accommodated him on his knee. On the way something was said about pickpockets, and soon the conversation became general on the subject. The gentleman who had the small boy on his knee said by way of a joke—

"'My little chap, how easily I could pick your pocket.'

"'No, you couldn't,' replied the youngster,

‘I’ve been a-keepin’ me eye on you all the time!’ ”

“There’s cuteness for you,” said Rabbits, as he finished his drink and went out into the night.

A sailor smiled at his departing form and knocked out his pipe.

“Minds me,” he said, “of when one of our torpedo-boat flotillas put in at one of the Mediterranean ports. A dance was given, ashore, to which all the officers were invited. In the middle of a set of lancers, a very excited foreigner dashed into the ball-room, and shouted out—

“ ‘Stop! Stop! Stop ze music, stop ze dancing, stop everythings, a naval officer on ze stairs is kissing my vife.’ ”

“Naturally every one was surprised, and the dancing stopped. The foreigner rushed out of the room, but before the dancers had time to form up again he had returned. This time he was all smiles, and waving both arms he shouted—

“ ‘ Oh ! go on with ze music, go on with ze dancing, go on with everythings, ze officer has apologized.’ ”

“ That was tact and cuteness,” said the sailor, “ these ’ere foreigners are more sensible than what we are.”

McAndrew saw that it was his turn to keep the ball rolling.

“ I ken ye are keen on golf stories,” he said. “ Maybe ye’ve not heard this one.

“ It was in the Highlands last summer that a Scots professor had gone two rounds with one of his old pupils and wished to repeat the experience next day.

“ ‘ Can you come and play to-morrow, Robert ? ’ he inquired.

“ ‘ Weel, professor,’ was the reply, ‘ I was going to be married to-morrow, but if you wish to play I can put that off.’ ”

“ They’re wonderful keen on games in Scotland,” said McAndrew, appearing not to notice the laughter that his story had occasioned.

"They are also vera proud. And the story is told of a Scotchman named Macdonald who was boasting of his family, and said that the clan had lived before the Flood.

" 'Well,' said his opponent, 'I never heard of the name of Macdonald ganging into the ark.'

" 'Noah's ark,' returned Macdonald in contempt; "who ever heard of a Macdonald that had not *a boat of his own* ?'

"That's Scotch spirit for you," added McAndrew stoutly.

"We have our pride in Ireland just the same," put in Terence, "as this story will show you.

"As a large ocean-going steamer was making her way down the Clyde, the officer in charge found his passage blocked by a dirty-looking empty ballast barge, the only occupant of which was a man sitting smoking a short, black pipe. Finding that he did not make any effort to get out of the way, the officer shouted in true nautical fashion. Taking the pipe from his mouth, the fellow rose and said—

“ ‘An’ is it yerself that’s the captin’ of that ship ? ’

“ ‘No,’ was the reply, ‘but I’m the chief officer.’

“ ‘Then talk to yer equals,’ said my countryman ; ‘Sure, I’m the captin’ of this.’ ”

Garge had been very silent whilst these stories were being told, and McAndrew turned to him.

“ Come, Garge,” he said, “ kin yer no tell us a story, mon ? ”

Garge scratched his head. “ Maybe I could,” he replied, and when he had thought deeply he began—

“ The other day a tramp called at Mrs. Hardnut’s begging for alms. She is a rather severe looking old party, but has a not unkindly heart for a deserving case. Said she, handing him a penny :

“ ‘ My good man, I’m not giving you this because you begged. I do it because doing a good and kindly act gives me a certain amount of pleasure.’

“ ‘ Well, mum,’ says the dirty-faced tramp, ‘ why didn’t yer bloomin’ well make it a bob and jolly well enjoy yourself. ’Ave a real good time ? ’ ”

A shout of laughter greeted Garge’s yarn, who thus then encouraged asked if his hearers remembered his story of the parson and the village idiot.

“ Let’s have it,” said Terence.

“ Well, the minister of a little chapel was one Sunday soundly rebuking his flock for their slack attendance, and for their bad habits when they did attend.

“ ‘ You are all on the downward path to hell,’ he shouted, banging the pulpit with his fist. ‘ Those of you who have come are asleep—all except the village idiot.’ ”

“ Suddenly a shrill and strident voice piped from the back of the chapel :

“ ‘ And I’d have darned well been asleep too if I hadn’t been an idiot.’ ”

Garge’s two yarns had particularly pleased

an elderly farmer who was sitting comfortably in a corner. Said he : " That last story reminds me of one showing how in the country things said are apt to be taken literally.

" I know an old-fashioned farmer who has learnt the lesson that nowadays it is necessary to be 'umble, werry 'umble, with indispensable labour.

" Losing his temper over some very bad work, he had the temerity to tell his head man to ' go to hell ! '

" The man promptly took himself off for four days, during which the stock and the crops commenced to go to blazes likewise. On the sixth day he turned up.

" ' In Heaven's name, wheer's t'been, Jarvis ? ' demanded the old farmer wrathfully.

" ' Wheer tha told me. '

" ' An' wheer's that ? ' asked the employer, who had forgotten the precise direction.

" ' Tha told me to go to hell, an' I'se been. '

" The old man scratched his chin thought-

fully; the situation seemed to demand thought.

“ ‘ Well,’ he said at length, “ an’ what’s hell like, Jarvis ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Saame as most plaaces,’ retorted the undefeatable Jarvis; ‘ them as ’as got t’most money gets nearest t’fire.’ ”

The old farmer seemed immensely amused by his own joke, as indeed were the rest of the company.

“ That reminds me,” said McAndrew, “ of a Glasgow professor who, meeting a stupid countryman, said to him—

“ ‘ How long can a person live without brains ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I dinna ken,’ replied the fellow, scratching his head; ‘ how long have you lived yourself, sir ? ’ ”

“ That was a cute reply,” said the soldier, “ and it calls to mind the story of a mess sergeant who approached a poulterer with a wink—

“ ‘I want some fowls, but they are only for the mess. I suppose you can distinguish the old ones. Pick them out, will you?’ ”

“The poulterer, with professional knowledge, picked out half of the twenty on the slab.

“ ‘Thanks,’ said the sergeant. ‘Now I’ll take all the rest.’ ”

“We have brains in the Army, we have,” said the soldier proudly.

“Brains,” said Izzy, “here’s an example of brains showed by my old friend Jacob.

“ ‘You’re getting fat, Jacob,’ I said to him one day, digging him playfully in the region of the belt. ‘Kervite a corporation!’ ”

“ ‘Corporation?’ answered Jacob. “ ‘Dot aindt no corporation. It’th a falth thtomach to inthpire confidenth on the Thtock Exchange!’ ”

“That’s brains for you,” said Izzy triumphantly.

Terence smiled. “Not half so clever as Murphy,” he said. “Murphy had promised

when away from home to always say his prayers, and he wanted to stick to his promise, but wished to save himself the bother of doing it. In order to keep his word and save time and himself trouble he wrote the words on paper, and stuck it up over his bed. Every night when he retired he nodded to the paper and said, 'Lord, them's my sentiments.'

"Organization there," said Terence; "and for brains you would have to go a long way to beat this—

"About seventy years ago the grand jury of the council of Tipperary passed the following resolutions :—

" ' 1. That a new court-house be built.

" ' 2. That the materials of the old court-house be used in the building of the new court-house.

" ' 3. That the old court-house should not be taken down until the new court-house is finished.'

"There's cleverness for you," said Terence, laughing.

“By the way, Izzy,” said Terence, “have you heard about Ikey?”

“No; what is it?” asked Izzy.

“They’ve taken away his appendix,” replied Terence.

“What a fool,” said Izzy angrily. “Vy didn’t he thettle it on his wife?”

“Nearly as much a fool as the individual of whom I will tell you,” said McAndrew.

“Some young fellows in the Navy shaved the head of a brother officer, an Irishman, when he was drunk, and put him to bed. He had previously given orders that he was to be called at five in the morning, and was accordingly called at that hour. When he looked in the glass and saw an appearance so unlike what he expected, ‘Hang me,’ said he, ‘if they haven’t called the wrong man!’ That’s a fair example of one of Terence’s countrymen.”

Terence denied the impeachment, and then told the following—

“A labourer enquired of the well-known Father Tom Maguire what a miracle was. He gave him a very good explanation, which, however, did not quite seem to satisfy the labourer, who said—

“ ‘Now, do you think your raverence could give me an example of miracles?’ ”

“ ‘Well,’ said Father Tom, ‘walk on before me, and I’ll see what I can do.’ ”

“As he did so he gave him a tremendous kick behind.

“ ‘Did you feel that?’ he asked.

“ ‘Why wouldn’t I feel it?’ said the labourer, rubbing the damaged place. ‘Begorra, I did feel it sure enough.’ ”

“ ‘Well,’ said Father Tom, ‘it would be a miracle if you didn’t.’ ”

“Here is a good story that I heard the other day,” put in the soldier. “A discharged Tommy who had served in the East is the subject of it. Civil life had brought its dangers and difficulties with it—chiefly of a matrimonial nature. As a consequence, both

the silver-badged one and his wife were brought before a metropolitan magistrate.

“ ‘What do you mean by striking your wife?’ asked the magistrate.

“ ‘She used awful language to me, sir,’ explained the culprit. ‘Most terrible words she used. Why, I ain’t ’eard such language since I left the ’Oly Land!’ ”

Izzy waited until the laughter had died down before speaking, but when it had done so he laid down his tankard.

“ ‘The other day we asked Moses Levi how his pal was,’ said Izzy.

“ ‘Oh, you mean Aaron,’ he replied. ‘Well, he’s werry bad, poor boy. He was ordered by his doctor to have a Turkish bath, and the blank ruffians nearly did for him. They first of all half-biled, and then, s’wulp me, scraped him until they came to the flannel shirt wot he wore ven he vas a baby. Oh, he’s awful bad, and no joke.’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ continued Izzy, “they nearly killed

him, but it served Aaron right. For I overheard him discussing the compensation he and a friend had extracted from a reluctant railway company on account of an accident on the line.

“ ‘ You only got £50, Ikey,’ remarked Aaron. ‘ Why I ’ad £350 orf the blighters.’ ”

“ ‘ Three ’undred and fifty ! Oy, oy ! ’Ow did yer do it, my dear ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Ah, that was presence o’ mind, Ikey.’ ”

“ The successful Aaron winked artfully.

“ ‘ Well, I’ll tell yer, Ikey ; and then it might be useful to yer in the future. I see the accident couldn’t be avoided, so just as the crash come, I ’ad the presence o’ mind to kick Rebecca in the face ! ’ ”

’Twas now ten of the clock.

Soon the door would be bolted and barred. Regretful at having to go, they rose from their familiar seats and went their several ways—happiness in their hearts.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MONKS' MOMENT

Many a worthy Father, many a prior grim,
Would laugh when telling of their beads, or chuckle
in a hymn ;
For Anselm's little story, although a chestnut old,
Was told on top of Malmsey rare, so therefore pure
gold.

JOHN OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, 1054.

THE Merrythought Inn was hushed to silence. Long since had McAndrew, Izzy, Terence, Garge and the rest gone their several ways in several different fashions, leaving a silent world filled with the spirit of laughter.

No doubt it was this spirit that prompted the old sign to rock to and fro in merriment ; anyhow, there were strange folk abroad on the old white highway and the hedges shook with amusement as grey-clad figures slipped

from ancient graves and came in a rollicking procession towards the Merrythought Inn.

It was a wonderful sight. Here was old Anselm, the cook of the old monastery, and a great wit, climbing through the window of the bar parlour, and as the little old prior, with the wizened face and merry eyes, tucked up his robe and followed a laugh went up.

One by one they came into the room until the place was crowded.

"There is a rare good atmosphere of wit here, my brothers," said Anselm; "methinks that these moderns know a funny story when they hear one."

Brother Botolph shook his head.

"Methinks they still cling to the old ones," he said softly. "I was here a night or so since, and I actually heard that one about the Carmelite Friar, you know."

Immediately a monkish titter of laughter echoed out to flirt with the moonbeams near the window.

"And he told it as though it was a fresh one," continued Botolph.

“I have just called to mind a most perfect story,” said a tall figure by the door, “and if any of you have heard it I beg you to keep a tactful silence so that those who have not may thoroughly appreciate the true relish of its flavour—for it is a good episode.”

He paused, and then, clearing his voice, began.

“This story is a true story of these present times. It tells of a most highly respected lawyer who until lately resided in a fine old manor house not many miles from here, and is known to most of you, I think.”

The other monks nodded.

“Well,” he continued, “the legal gentleman is well on in years and was blessed with one of the saintliest women for wife you could well imagine. He also had at the Manor House in addition to other servants a governess named Miss Jones, and she was a sprightly girl enough.”

He paused and looked about him.

“In the course of time, though,” he continued, “the old lawyer’s wife died, but still

he remained in the old house with Miss Jones, much to the amazement of the inhabitants of the little town.

“How sadly waned his popularity. For the town clerk met the postmaster and talked. The postmaster gossiped to the churchwarden. Till at last the good folk waxed indignant, and decided to boycott the ‘old knave,’ as they called him.

“This went on for some time, but at last a more generous feeling coming into the hearts of the people, they decided to bury the hatchet and reinstate the old fellow in his old position.

“For this purpose, the Psychological Society that meets at the little Public Hall gave a dinner, and asked the old man to be the guest of the evening, and when the time arrived he was invited to make the first speech.

“He immediately rose up and looking around, cleared his throat, then

“‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he began, ‘at one time, as you are aware, I was not much interested in spiritualism you study, but of late I must confess I am more inclined to be less

sceptical, for there is one incident in my life that will, perhaps, stand out above many others.

“ ‘As you all know, our old house dates back to almost Saxon times, and one night, or rather early morning, it was nearly one of the clock, in the witching time, that I heard a knock at my door. I sat up in bed expecting something to happen, but nothing did. Imagine my feelings at that moment. There I sat and waited. Suddenly there came that tap, tap, tapping again, and then the door slowly opened, and a long, slender white arm came stealing round the opening. I turned, and I nudged Miss Jones . . . ’ ”

Brother Ambrose finished his story in the peals of laughter that followed his narrative, and it fell to Brother Ignace to cap this yarn with yet another.

“ ‘Two farmers met in a road,’ he began, “and the one, George by name, turned to the other, whom we will call Bill, and said—

“ ‘My old mare is ill, George; didn’t ’e have a sick mare some time back?’ ”

“ ‘Aye!’ came the reply. ”

“ ‘What did ’e do for ’un?’ asked Bill. ”

“ ‘Why!’ said George, ‘I gave her two pints o’ turps.’ ”

“ They parted, but in the course of a few days met again, and the first question touched on was the sick mare. ”

“ ‘You know I told you about my mare being ill, Bill,’ said George. ”

“ ‘Aye!’ came the reply. ”

“ ‘An’ you told me to give ’un two pints of turps.’ ”

“ ‘Well!’ said Bill. ”

“ ‘When thee gavest thine two pints of turps what happened to ’un?’ ”

“ ‘The mare died,’ came the reply. ”

“ ‘Yes!’ cried Bill, ‘an’ mine’s dead an’ all!’ ”

It was now the turn of Brother Eustace to give an example of his wit, which he did in the following anecdote.

“Imagine,” said Eustace, “a lonely moor in Yorkshire, with a friendly hostelry in the most desolate part. To this inn there came a drover, who without more than giving his order and taking his glass in hand settled himself in the chimney-corner and gave himself up to unintelligent contemplation of nothing in particular. Here he sat for an hour, when there came into the inn another drover, who in the same fashion bought and paid for a drink. The two were silent for half an hour, when at last the first one who had entered looked up.

“ ‘Didst see old brown cow on th’ moor?’ he asked, looking from beneath lowered brows.

“Half an hour elapsed without a word.

“At last the other drover looked up.

“ ‘It wasn’t brown cow,’ he said, ‘’twas brown bull.’

“Silence profound settled over everything for an hour. But at last the quiet was broken by the first drover rising. He got to his feet and commenced to walk to the door.

“ ‘Going?’ questioned the second drover.

“ ‘Aye,’ came the reply.

“ ‘Why so soon?’ said the second drover.

“ The answer he got was definite.

“ ‘There’s too much damned argument here,’ came the quick reply—and then the drover had gone.”

The whimsical nature of Brother Eustace’s story evidently touched the funny-bones of the monks, and a large laugh went up from the saintly figures, and they began to chant, at first in Latin, and eventually in their native tongue, some of those curious verses that had become in this modern time to be called Limericks.

The tune to which they sang them was “Fol de re rol, fol de re rol, fol de re rol de ri ladi”—a taking melody that they all appreciated.

“ Two Methodists pious and tall
Went to visit the Exeter Hall.

To May Meetings though bent
To the Oxford they went—

They took the wrong turning—that’s all.”

The little old prior was standing on a chair conducting, and he led them in the following—

“There once was a Monk of Siberia,
Who grew drearier and drearier and
drearier,
Until one day with a yell
He leapt from his cell
And kissed a Mother Superior.”

“Do you know this one?” said Ambrose, with a big laugh.

“There was a young fellow named Tate
Who went out to dine at 8.8.
I will not relate
What that fellow named Tate
And his tête-à-tête ate at 8.8.”

“Fol de re rol, fol de re rol, fol de re rol de ri lady,” sang the monks, drowning the last line, as the clock went round and the moments crept into minutes and the hours snatched the minutes unto themselves.

The distant farmyard was stirring to activity. A faint cock-crow was welcoming the red tint in the eastern horizon, and the paling light of

the moon in the old bar-parlour warned all that the day was at hand and that it was time to have done with the song.

The rioting choruses died, the window was left unworried again at last, and the first errant rays of the rising sun peeped into an empty place—day had come. Over everything was peace save amongst the branches of the trees, where a bevy of birds were nearly falling over with laughter.

“Did you see Ambrose fall over the church-yard wall?” said one bird to the other, and the other bird winked its eye and chirruped, “Cheep, cheep.”

CHAPTER THREE

SONG AND STORY

Be happy whilst you're living, for it's never very long,
That the darkness finds in coming to end the joyous
song.

WILLIAM ADAMS, 1276.

THERE had been some great nights at the Merrythought Inn—nights when the spirits of the old monks must have been very near, for a more than amusing atmosphere had been present in the old bar parlour, and the laughter echoes by window and shadowed recess were deeper and more reverberent.

Sometimes during the passages of humour an old-time song would come into the minds of those who found hospitality between these four walls, and if we give these songs it is only because this is a human narrative, and that

we wish none of our readers to miss a moment of the happy time spent in this more than precious atmosphere of conviviality and good cheer.

Thus sang Terence when the fire of enthusiasm was high, and the spirit of the old monks permeated all and everything.

“ Oh, I would sing thee a right good song,
When the wind is cold, and the way is long ;
A song of the happy days of yore,
A song of the footfalls on the floor.

“ The feet of the men who came this way,
In the gold and the grey of yesterday ;
With a song on their lips and a joke to tell,
Where the lilt of the laugh and the music fell.

“ A right good song and a right good band,
With a trill and a cry and a saraband ;
As the night light melts to the rosy day,
And the sprites of the dark steal soft away.”

Terence had a fine voice, and when its last notes had echoed away to sport with the shadows by the door, McAndrew leant forward to tell a story.

“A fellow had a parrot of which he was very proud, and which he had skilfully instructed to say many interesting things. An uncle from whom he had expectations was coming to stay with him, and he thought it would please his uncle if he could teach the parrot to say, ‘Good-morning, uncle.’ Accordingly, he said to Polly—

“‘Say good-morning, uncle.’

“The parrot said, ‘Good-morning.’

“‘Good-morning, *uncle*.’

“The parrot simply said, ‘Good-morning.’

“Over and over again the man repeated, ‘Good-morning, uncle.’

“The parrot, however, refused to say the word ‘uncle.’

“The man raved and swore, lost his temper, and taking the parrot by the neck, took it into the garden and threw it in the chicken-house. He returned later in the day considerably calmed down, went to get Polly and restore the bird to its cage. To his dismay he found all the chickens dead with their necks rung, except one, whom Polly was clutching,

saying, 'Say good-morning, uncle. Say good-morning, *uncle*.'

"The man was so impressed that he reinstated the bird, and it lived happily ever afterwards."

"That was a clever bird," put in Terence, "but not half so clever as an animal spoken about at my club. At the club the other night they were talking about clever dogs. One man was telling of his dog who would take a penny and go to the baker's and bring back a bun. A canny Scot who was there told of his collie, who also used to have a penny and would go to a baker's and bring back a bun. After a time, however, they found that instead of as usual bringing his cake and eating it, that the dog used to save up the pennies until he had got six, and would then go to the baker's and get seven buns for sixpence."

After Terence's story the conversation became general, until Mr. Sparkington, a commercial

traveller but newly arrived from London, retailed the following—

“An old gentleman, clad in an immaculate suit of light grey flannel, was sitting on a bench in the park smoking a cigar and enjoying the sunshine. A small boy was lying on the grass watching the old chap very intently.

“‘What’s the matter, my lad?’ said he. ‘Why don’t you run about and play?’

“‘Don’t want to,’ replied the urchin.

“‘But, my dear boy,’ insisted the old gentleman, ‘it’s not natural for a boy to be so quiet. Why don’t you want to?’

“‘Oh, well, I’m just waiting, that’s all.’

“‘Waiting? But what for?’

“‘I’m just waiting,’ retorted the boy, ‘till you get up. That seat was freshly painted about a quarter of an hour ago.’”

“History doesn’t record what the old gent said when he *did* arise,” said Mr. Sparkington.

The Cockney, 'Arry Evins, placed his glass down on the table. “Let me tell you about a mate of mine,” he said.

“He had been lounging around the docks for many weary weeks in the hope of finding a job; consequently, when one day he was approached and asked if he would start on a diving operation, even though he was entirely ignorant of the work, he jumped with avidity at the chance. Then in due time he was arrayed in full dress, helmet and all complete, and after full instructions had been given him he was lowered. A little time later those in the boat above received frantic signals from below and hurriedly hauled him to the surface.

“‘What’s up?’ asked the foreman, as he unscrewed the diver’s helmet.

“‘Berlimey, guv’nor,’ replied the other in tones of extreme bitterness, ‘this perishin’ job ain’t no bally good to me. I can’t even spit on my bloomin’ ’ands!’”

It was the turn of Bert Hurry the sailor, and he looked quizzically at Izzy before he spoke. “This is a story about your fraternity,” he said.

“A certain shipwrecked party lay becalmed, on a raft, in mid-ocean. Their provisions and

water had failed them ten days since, and they waited death with Christian fortitude and resignation ; all save one, who was a Jew. At length a ship was descried in the offing. Imagine their joy ! The Jew, sitting with his head buried in his hands, was aroused by the cries of ' A sail ! A sail ! ' But was *he* truly thankful ? Did *he* betray any exuberance of spirits ? No. He cast his head-covering on the waters and spat thereon, and cried—

“ ‘ A thale ! Vell, vell, vell—just my blooming luck ! S’help me, Bill ; there’th a thale—and I haven’t got no catalogue ! ’ ”

Izzy took the story about his race very well, and would have spoken, but McAndrew was ready with one.

“ At a Scotch fair a farmer was trying to engage a lad, but would not finish the bargain until he brought a character from the last place, so he said : ‘ Run and get it, and meet me at the cross, at four o’clock. ’

“ The youth was up to time, and the farmer

said: 'Well, have you got your character with you?'

"'Na,' replied the youth; 'but I've got yours, an I'm no' comin.'"

The company enjoyed a hearty laugh. Then said Terence, "Shure, Mac's story reminds me of another yarn about a character.

"Biddy Malone was in a great fever of excitement when she landed in America, direct from the 'ould counthry.' Her certificate of character was lost on board ship, and what would she be after doin'? To her great happiness and consolation, Tim Mulligan, her Irish friend, volunteered and wrote her the following beautiful recommendation:—

"'This is to certify that Biddy Malone had a good character before she left the "ould counthry," but lost it on shipboard, comin' over.'"

McAndrew followed on:

"Tammass and Mrs. McKindie were journeying together.

"'Tammass, A feel awfu' sick,' said Mrs.

McKindie, who was travelling by tube for the first time in her life.

“ ‘Wumman,’ said her alarmed and thrifty spouse, ‘ye canna be sick ! ye canna be sick ! Dinna ye see there’s a penalty of forty shillin’s just for spitting ? ’ ”

“ That’s a good story,” said a mechanic of the Air Force who had just entered ; “ and if you would like to hear it I will tell you one in which I figured.”

“ Fire away,” said Terence, with laughing eyes.

“ Well,” came the reply, “ a sub. stood thoughtfully inspecting his side-car, the mechanic at his side.

“ ‘ Is she in running order, Jones ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ replied the mechanic. ‘ I’ve given her a thorough oiling, greased the cornet and piston, the exhaust pipe, the carburettor, the pluribus unum and the clutch, filled the reservoir, accelerated the muffled tread, eased the thingamajig, and had the hot boxes in the refrigerator for half a day.’ ”

“ The sub. walked slowly round the faithful machine.

“ ‘My hat!’ he cried, wrathfully, ‘if you haven’t forgotten to rub the number-plate with that patent dust-collecting compo!’

“Yes,” added the speaker, when his story had been told—“and my name is Jones.”

The mechanic’s story had evidently inspired Garge, for he looked up, and the settled look on his face gave place to a smile.

“Farmer Cornstalk spent his Christmas with Farmer Stubblefield, and, getting rather drunk early in the evening, set off home. ‘Some’ hours later a few of his cronies came across him prone on his back in the road, fast asleep, with the moon shining full upon him. They proceeded to stir him up a bit, when Cornstalk turned over and mildly ejaculated, ‘Mary, give me my share of the bedclothes, and put that infernal light out.’ ”

“Why, Garge,” said McAndrew, slapping the countryman on the back, “you *are* in form to-night. Izzy,” he continued, “it’s your turn.”

Izzy laughed with his eyes. "Two Jews were coming away together from a theatre," he began, "when one said to the other—

" 'I say, Tholomon, come into a fortune, have yer ? ' "

" 'No. Vy ? ' "

" 'Vell, what did you put half a crown in the cloakroom plate for ? ' "

" 'Vell, didn't yer see what a fine coat I'd got ? ' "

The fun was rising fast and furious now, and tale after tale was told. The following told by the soldier was enjoyed.

"It was dinner-time at our barracks in the Birmingham district, and an officer of the Imperial Yeomanry, who was training for active service, came into the mess, and seating himself said to the trooper who was attending the officers :

" 'What have you for dinner to-day ? ' "

" 'Tinned mutton, sir,' said the trooper, who before joining up had been in the habit of faring sumptuously every day.

“ ‘H’m,’ said the officer. ‘What do I get after that?’ ”

“ ‘A blooming fit, I expect, sir,’ replied the trooper, as he flicked a fly with a serviette.

Our soldier friend’s yarn provoked the usual laughter; and then said the worthy landlord :

“ I think it’s my turn.”

“ Rather ! ” shouted the assembled company.

“ Well,” said Boniface, “ a country vicar’s fair daughter held very modern views and disliked the dreary services at her father’s church. In preference she would go for walks. One Sunday at lunch the vicar said to her sternly :

“ ‘Why were you not at Matins?’ ”

“ ‘Oh,’ replied the fair damsel demurely, ‘I was walking with God in the meadows.’ ”

“ A deaf old aunt sitting opposite at once piped out :

“ ‘Yes, I saw you, but I didn’t quite catch the young man’s name. Will you please tell it me again, my dear?’ ”

“Speaking of matters of a domestic nature,” said McAndrew, “it was a Scotchman—Professor Wilkie, I think—who said to a boy whom he met—

“‘I was sorry to hear that there was fever in your family last spring. Was it you or your brother who died of it?’

“‘It was me, sir,’ said the boy.”

Terence laughed. “That’s nearly as funny,” he said, “as the barrister who, when defending a prisoner in Limerick, said—

“‘Gentlemen of the jury, think of his poor mother—his only mother!’”

“All this humour,” said the commercial traveller, “reminds me of a playwright who rushed into a theatrical manager’s office, and, banging him on the shoulder, exclaimed—

“‘Ah, my boy, I’ve done it at last. I have written a play which will make our fortunes.’

“‘Not so fast,’ said the manager. ‘Just give me an outline of the plot.’

“ ‘Right!’ said the author. ‘The scene is midnight; a large house surrounded by a big wall forms the background; two low-looking ruffians are seen creeping towards the house; they scale the wall, and successfully prise open a window of the house. Just as they are entering the clock strikes one.’

“ ‘Which one?’ asked the manager.”

“ ‘I hear some good ones at the camp,’ said the soldier, during a break in the laughter. ‘This one is not bad, and I think with the popularity of racing in these parts you’ll appreciate it.’

“ ‘A young fellow, who had lived all his life in the country, recently paid his first visit to a racecourse. He mingled in the crowd about the bookmakers. The excitement prevailing there communicated itself to him. So he approached a bookmaker and said:

“ ‘If I put a shilling on a horse, and it wins, how much do I get?’

“ ‘If the horse starts at 50 to 1,’ the bookmaker answered, ‘you get 51 shillings. If it

starts at 20 to 1 you get 21 shillings. If it starts at 10 to 1 you get 11 shillings.'

The young countryman still looked puzzled.

" 'But,' he said, 'supposing it starts at one o'clock ? ' "

" 'This isn't new,'" said a Lancashire man, who had hitherto been a silent listener of the fun, "but some of us haven't heard all the old ones. It is the custom in the North after a funeral for the mourners to return to the house and partake of a sort of high-tea meal, and generally tinned salmon and specially boiled ham are considered luscious viands, and their inclusion in the repast considered the very height of hospitality.

"A poor chap lay very ill, and his soft-hearted wife consoled him.

" 'Now, love,' she said, 'what ud'ee like to eat ? ' "

" 'I dinna want aught,' he feebly replied.

" 'Aye, have a bit of summat ; it will doo thee good,' she persuaded.

" 'Noa, noa ; I'm not for wanting aught,' he repeated.

“ ‘But oor Joe, thee moost,’ she went on. ‘Doctor chap says as tha con ’ave ought as tha’d fancy.’ ”

“The poor patient leaned over and a bit of light came into his heavy eyes as he gently sniffed a little. ‘Well, well,’ he said, ‘if A moost, A moost. A think A’ll ’ave a bit of that ther bil’d ’am as ther cooking.’ ”

“ ‘Nay, nay,’ she said quickly, though sorrowfully, ‘tha cannot have that. That’s fer the funeral.’ ”

It was getting late, and at last the fund of stories that could be called to mind was finished.

“It’s me for a song,” said Terence, and soon he was singing a lusty chorus that was taken up by the others—

“A joke, a laugh, a song,
And so pass life away;
For sadness comes ere long,
Let us be glad to-day.
Right happy with mirth as the
days fleet by,
Merry with humour and jollity!”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MONKS' MERRY MEETING

In and about in ghostly rout
The monks now come—now go,
With many a laugh and eerie shout
As the sign swings to and fro.
As the sign swings harsh in the rising wind
That only these wraith-forms know.

LORD HARNDYKE OF FOODLEUM, 1778.

It would hardly be a complete chronicle of the happenings at the Merrythought Inn to omit all these evenings when the giddy old monks from the ruined monastery, from the low foundations, sauntered out to keep the spirit of humour alive in the old place.

Thus it was that when mine good host had laid his slippers down by the bed, and had snuffed his candle to creep in between the

sheets, next his good lady, whose hair was already in the useful if unadorned curling-pins, that from their sleeping-places came the ghostly visitors of the inn.

The road was white with their figures. Here came Ambrose round and jolly as in life; Eustace, Augustine, Chrysostom, Botolph, and Edmund, and many another of those quipsters who had learnt to laugh at Matins, and had found that it did the world a world of good.

Dismiss from your minds at once any scepticism as to the noble motives of these nightly visitors. Do not think that they came either to lick the bung of the barrel, or to sniff the final trickle from the empty bottle. They had neither design on the old Benedictine nor the giddy brandy-flask, their object was purely altruistic—they came to keep merriment alive and they left the dregs to John the Ostler, who had many a time got drunk on swipes and had been known to appreciate the bottom of a three-quarter finished glass just as much as a sweet little mouse appreciates the cheese we leave nightly for it in the likely place.

They were grand spirits, just as they had been grand fellows in their lifetime, and as they came along with a swinging stride the good fellowship could be seen in their faces and in the shake of their paunches as the humour began to circulate through the night.

Somewhere a cat, on the tiles, was laughing, fit to break its sides, for these fellows of infinite fancy had a way of making the most dignified mouser absolutely have paroxysms of mirth. Many had been found dead in the morning in a recumbent position, and although John Henry, the best shot in the village, had been blamed, it was always brought home to the door of the monks, although the cat was generally found dead at the door of the Merrythought Inn.

On this night of nights there were many cats to die. Indeed, the village was to be robbed of the pest that peoples our dreams with torture and gives a sleepless night the accompaniment of a Viennese orchestra.

Into the keyholes crept those ghostly figures, through holes in the lintels of the window and

past broken panes, and it was during the process of getting through the window that Ambrose turned to Anselm, and with a soft swear word said in Latin to rob it of its punch, remarked how thin he was getting these days.

Afterwards the conversation turned on expletives, and it was this topic that gave rise to the witty story, here told by Eustace, a monkish nut and one of the lads of the monastery in the days when one wink at a nun was better than none.

“A certain Father,” began Eustace, “one of the pleasantest of all priests, past or present, gave me an instance of this kind, when his temper was sorely tried. Among his parishioners was a drunken fellow, who when in his cups was violent and often beat his wife. One cold and stormy winter’s evening the Father, having had his dinner, had settled himself snugly by his bright fireside, and was just brewing his tumbler of whisky punch, when his servant ran into the room, crying out, ‘Your raverence is wanted out instantly.

That violent man, Tom Murphy, is killing his wife, and if you're not there at once she will be dead.' Down he ran to the cottage, and on his arrival found that they had succeeded in quieting the drunkard, who was lying in a state of drunken exhaustion on the bed. The Father was in no frame of mind to speak gently to him; his language, I fear, was not quite clerical, 'blackguard' and 'drunken ruffian' being about his mildest expressions. The man turned his face to the wall, and in a meek and humble voice said, 'Go away, your raverence, go away. I'm not in a fit state to listen to your holy voice.' "

There was an outburst of laughter from the assembled monks when this story was told, and it prompted Botolph to tell the following.

"I witnessed this when a familiar at an old church," he said.

"A strange parson officiating in this country church in the absence of the rector, to his horror saw the gentleman who handed round the plate, when returning it to him, slip a half-crown

off, and put it into his waistcoat pocket. Immediately after the service he told the sexton to request the gentleman to come to him in the vestry room. When he came he said to him—

“ ‘Sir, I was never so shocked and pained in my life. I distinctly saw you, sir, abstract a half-crown from the plate and put it into your pocket.’ ”

“ ‘Of course you did,’ replied the man; ‘here it is. I always do so. You see, when I get the plate, before I begin to hand it round, I always place a half-crown on it in order to induce people to give more than they would do otherwise, and I afterwards remove it, as you saw me do.’ ”

Dunstan was greatly tickled by Botolph's story. “It reminds me of yet another,” he said.

“An old lady asked one of my order how it was that Solomon was permitted to have seven hundred wives, not to mention the three hundred other ladies. He explained to her that

the manners and customs of those days were quite different from those of the present day.

“ ‘Dear me,’ she said, ‘what privileges those early Christians had!’ ”

“And she was right,” put in Ambrose, laughing largely. “Celibate as I was in the material state, I was ever conscious of the handicap to those who sought out matrimony.”

The others nearly split their sides, for Ambrose in his time had really been a devil of a fellow.

“Humanity is greatly hampered,” put in Augustine, a thin, wizened spirit.

“You see, a man’s life naturally divides itself into three distinct periods. The first is that in which he’s planning and contriving all sorts of villainy and rascality; that is the period of youth and innocence. The second is that in which he is puttin’ into practice the villainy and rascality he contrived before; that is the prime of life or the flower of manhood. The third and last period is that in which he is

making his soul and preparing for another world ; that is the period of dotage."

Augustine's philosophy formed a topic of discussion for some little time, until Eustace came along with an Irish story which ran as follows :—

In giving answers the Irish peasantry, as a rule, have no great regard for truth, but like to give the answer which they think will be most agreeable to the questioner. A poor Italian organ-grinder, weary after a long walk, asked a peasant whom he met near Carricktuoihil how far he was from Cork.

" 'Just four short miles,' was the answer.

" 'What do you mean ? ' said Father Rufus, who happened to be passing at the time, ' by deceiving the poor fellow ? You know well enough it's eight long miles.'

" 'Sure, your raverence,' said the other ; ' I seen the poor boy was tired, and I wanted to keep his courage up. If he heard your raverence—but I'm plazed to think he didn't—he'd be downhearted entirely.' "

“He was a *nouveau riche* of the most pronounced type,” said Ambrose, keeping the ball rolling as usual, “rejoicing in the name of Ramsbotham, and having taken a house in London and set himself down seriously to conquer society, it occurred to him that he ought to have a crest and coat-of-arms. Therefore one day he called upon the Heralds’ College, where, after he had acquainted them with his desires, they promised to fulfil his wants. In due course he presented himself again before the head herald.

“‘I think I have got something to suit you,’ exclaimed the latter, as he handed the design to the plutocrat. ‘That will be your crest—representing, as you see, a ram’s head.’

‘And the motto?’ ventured the other as he gazed at it. ‘A Latin one, I ’ope!’

“‘Yes,’ answered the official gravely, ‘I suggest “*Audi alteram partem.*” ’”

“That was wit of a fine order,” said Chrysostom; “and it reminds me of one of my teacher’s answers to a monk who said—

“ ‘I wish you were St. Peter.’

“ ‘Why?’ asked my mentor.

“ ‘Because,’ said the monk, ‘you would have the keys of heaven, and could let me in.’

“ ‘It would be better for you,’ said my master, ‘that I could have the keys of the other place, for then I could let you out.’ ”

Edmund, who had just crept in through the keyhole, thought he could assist in the jollity, which he certainly did.

“ Barnabas had been married twice before he took unto himself a third wife in the person of the elderly spinster lady, Edytha. In Malmesbury, where they were passing the first days of their honeymoon, one morning Barnabas met a friend who asked how they were enjoying themselves.

“ ‘Ah,’ said Barnabas, with a reminiscent smile, ‘to me it is nothing new, but,’ and here he paused and gave a decided wink, ‘Edytha, oh! she is very well pleased.’ ”

Now, it has not been chronicled here before

that amongst these gentlemen who made the night happy with wit was one who sang with the voice as of the angels.

In old days he had led the choir in the old monastery, and his voice was of the sweetness of many choristers, and even now in his spirit state the gift of music had not left him.

"Come, Anselm," said Eustace, "will you sing to us? The stories are told and soon it will be dawn and the time for our going."

Anselm was silent. "To-night it has been all humour," he said. "Perhaps it would seem out of place if I sang as in the old days, when the great bell sounded and we filed into our places to sing praises to Him who gave us this great spirit that has lived through the ages and helps to keep the heart of the world up."

Ambrose looked up. "Why not a good song," he said. "There is humour in beauty, just by reason of the contrast, for wit is a matter of contrasts; come, Anselm, sing what thou wilt we shall be pleased."

When Ambrose had finished speaking there

came upon the air a beautiful chord of music—it was a perfect strain of sound that had blended in its composition all the loveliness of song.

Anselm moved to the centre of the room, and thus he sang, with his eyes uplifted and his fellow-monks standing ringed around him. Above, the clock was striking the hour of three.

“Softly there falls upon our eager ears
The melody of other distant years ;
The song once dead comes to enjoy re-birth,
And overhead there dawns a message to the earth.

“Gloria, gloria, high in the blue it peals,
Transcendent in its beauty, and its lay
The song of songs, the harmony that heals,
And wipes away the stain of yesterday.

“Ring out, O song, peal out ye heavenly bells,
O beauteous spirit, music's soul to me ;
For in thy choiring my spirit tells
That souls, now bound, to-morrow shall be free.

“O lovely strains, who heavenly harpist playing,
We know for whom the silent night is praying,
The watching stars that smile upon old earth
And whisper in their smile of second birth.

“O wondrous heavens of pure and azure blue,
Almighty world, planets beyond our view.
Celestial kingdoms, all prepared to hold,
The souls of they who linger in the mould.

“How shall I sing, what words can e’er express
The meaning of thy striking loveliness.
What carol echo to the thrones on high
Where sit the souls of those who never die !

“Wing down, O tune, O melody divine,
Play on my heart and melt it into thine.
Just as the ocean takes the river in,
With my small soul thy work of love begin.

“Peal upon peal, music above compare
All through the night wondrous and rare.
Down through the paths, past starlight stealing
Into my soul and heart pealing and pealing.”

The melody was taken up by the others until a glorious choir of voices sang to the eastering sky as the night melted away and a song heralded the dawn.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOLDIERS ALL

There's a sound of tramping feet, there's a sound
of tramping feet,
For the boys are homeward marching down the
dear old dusty street.

JACK JONES, 1918.

THEY had flushed into the village with a blare
of bugles and a tapping of drums—a regiment
of infantry back from the great war, and
marching to their depot.

A halt in this peaceful spot had sent many
of them to the Merrythought Inn, and they
found but few people there, for the sun was
high in the sky and the workers were in the
fields.

Soon the cup that cheers was flowing, and
with it came the spirit of the old place, so

that the battledore and shuttlecock of humour began to be played with a right goodwill.

“There are times in the Army when differences in rank do not count,” said a tall private as he placed his glass down.

“It was the first appearance in the front line of the man of whom I am telling, and he was discovered by his sergeant tucked away comfortably in a shell-hole well out of the way of even a stray bullet.

“‘Get out of that hole!’ commanded the sergeant rudely. ‘Get out of it immediately!’

“The usually good-natured face looked up at him with stubborn resistance written on every feature.

“‘You may be me superior officer,’ he answered with cold decision, ‘but, all the same, I’m the one that found this hole first. You go an’ take your place in the queue.’”

The occupants of the bar-parlour laughed at the private’s story, especially so as the sergeant-major beat a hasty retreat at hearing the story, a fact which gave rise to a sigh

from Private Hawkins, a short, ginger-haired Tommy.

"Ah," he reflected, "what are we all going to do when we're back in 'civvies' again?"

"'Punch the sergeant-major on the nose!' replied an old hand near the door without a moment's hesitation.

"Then you'll have to take your proper place with the other 'undred!" retorted Hawkins, with, for him, amazing truculence.

For a moment the story-telling flagged, but it was a lance-corporal who took it up.

"A certain Irish sergeant," he began, "was exceedingly wrath when he discovered that one of his men had paid a visit to the regimental barber and was minus his moustache.

"'Private Andrews,' he roared, 'who on earth gave yez permission to get that moustache off?'

"'Nobody,' answered Andrews unconcernedly; 'only I thought it would better my appearance.'

"'Better your appearance with a face like

yours !' bawled the enraged N.C.O. 'If yez don't hiv it on again at the afternoon parade to-day there'll be trouble !' "

"That reminds me of Pat O'Malley," said a soldier who revelled in the name of Timmins.

"Pat, of the Royal Munster Clean-ups, was dictating a letter to the ministering angel who attended to him in hospital. The letter was to blue-eyed Colleen at home.

" 'The nurses here,' proclaimed Pat, 'ar-re a wonderful plain-headed lot——'

" 'Oh, come !' expostulated the ministering angel, arresting the busy pen, 'that is not very polite to us, is it ?' "

" 'Be aisy, nurse, an' put it down,' said Pat, with a wink. 'Sure, it'll plaise the gur-rl.' "

Jorkins, the drum-major, kept the ball rolling. "Here's one like that," he began.

"A certain officer was inspecting his company the other morning, when he came upon a big, burly Irishman, who obviously hadn't shaved for at least forty-eight hours. .

“ ‘What does this mean, my man?’ he exclaimed sternly. ‘Why haven’t you shaved this morning?’ ”

“ ‘Sure and I did, captain!’ remonstrated the Irishman.

“ ‘What the devil do you mean by saying that,’ snapped the other, ‘when I can see all that stuff on your chin?’ ”

“The Irishman shifted uneasily on his feet.

“ ‘There was ten o’ us, sorr, to one bit o’ glass,’ he muttered at length, ‘and I suppose in the gineral confusion I must have shaved some other fellow’s face!’ ”

Atkins, the Colonel’s batman, smiled, for he was always so spick and span, and, the conversation having turned on the matter of optimism and pessimism, he leaned forward.

“I say, Jorkins,” he asked, “can you tell me exactly what ‘optimistic’ means?”

Scratching his head, Jorkins observed—

“Well, look ’ere, Atkins, it’s this ’ere way. A chap ’ud be considered an optimist who looked for the silver lining in a cloud of mustard gas.”

The whole company laughed heartily, and the boys began to remember many a war story, of which the following, told by a burly sergeant, is a good specimen—

“The big American soldier came along the broken road blithely singing, and driving before him a forlorn, desolate, very much ashamed German officer. The captive had a look of pain on his face, and was bent nearly double. Moreover, both hands were pressed to that part of his body which nature has designed for the proper punishment of naughty children.

“Presently an English staff officer came along and stopped the Yankee.

“‘Hadn’t you better try to get some sort of a conveyance for your prisoner?’ he asked.

“‘Oh, I guess he can walk all right, sir,’ said the Yank.

“‘But he’s wounded, isn’t he?’

“‘Waal, no, I guess not,’ drawled the Doughboy. ‘You see, sir, it’s this-a-way. When I captured him he thought I couldn’t understand German—but I could, and so I just had to kick him!’”

Suddenly one soldier, an oldish fellow who had been thinking profoundly for some little time, chimed in with a yarn he had suddenly remembered.

"A sergeant-major of the old type," he began, "had his troubles in the small matter of the letter 'h.' At the morning drill he called out the raw non-coms. in turn to put the company through. There was a conspiracy afoot, for one after another of the budding sergeants delivered the "'Alt' with terrific emphasis. The instructor dropped to the game.

"'Look here,' he roared, 'there's only two men in the regiment allowed to say "'Alt!'" One's the Colonel, the other's me. All the others when they want to give "'Alt" must give "'Alt" with a haitch.'"

"That story and this place calls to memory a yarn I heard," put in Jorkins. "There were two officers up in a balloon, and they were becoming uncomfortably aware that night was coming on and they did not know where they were. Some distance below them an old farm-

hand was trudging homeward after his day's work; and, gradually descending, they hailed him. Nearly overhead, one of them yelled—

“ ‘ Hi, tell us where we are ! ’ ”

“ The yokel merely gazed in amazement. The officer, thinking he had not heard, shouted louder than before—

“ ‘ Where are we ? ’ ”

“ Just as the balloon drifted past came the answer—

“ ‘ Whoi, ye're in a balloon, ain't yer ? ’ ”

A chuckle came from the corner where a little man, wearing the silver badge, was seated, and this happy fellow trotted out the following—

“ For a solid hour an officer had been lecturing his men on ‘ the duties of a soldier,’ and he thought it was time to see how much they had understood.

“ ‘ Now, you, my man,’ he said, ‘ why should a soldier be ready to die for his country ? ’ ”

“ The man scratched his head for a moment, and then smiled engagingly.

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ he said pleasantly, as if a new

side to the question had presented itself suddenly, 'you're quite right. Why should he?' "

The quaintness of the joke rather tickled these men.

" 'Minds me of a yarn about myself,' said a soldier who had not hitherto spoken.

" 'I had been in the Army a whole twelve months, and was still a private, when one day the colonel asked me if I would like to be promoted.

" 'It all depends on what you mean by promotion, sir,' I replied diffidently. 'I don't think I know enough to be a sergeant, but I know too much to be a second-lieutenant.' "

Away down the street a bugle was sounding the fall-in, and soon only the echoes of old laughter tenanted the bar-parlour.

CHAPTER SIX

AN ARABIAN NIGHT

One moment with a whisky and a splash,
One moment for a fair amount of cash.
And lo ! the time for turning out has come,
And outside it is dark enow—oh ! dash.

*Hitherto unpublished quatrain of
Omar Khayyám.*

THERE is one important thing that must be chronicled in connection with the Merry-thought Inn, and that is that never two evenings were alike there. It was one of those places full of change, the light and shade of life and all sorts and conditions of characters filled its generous parlour and came like pilgrims to this fountain-head of mirth, music, laughter, and jollity.

Just as the old monks came by night, and

stole softly away with the morning shadows when the dawn came, so did wayfarers stop their journeys either to Oxford, Aylesbury, Wycombe, or London, and partake of the cup that cheers and the laugh that is worth the crown of any king, and double that of a Hapsburg or a Hohenzollern.

Thus it was that one day down the dear white road, upon which leant the old fifteenth-century cottages and houses whose windows looked out with tired old eyes at the stretch of way, there came a strange figure.

He was a man that nature had made dark, for he obviously came from the East. One glance at his eyes told you that, and the village children, ever fearful of gipsies, cowered back in the shelter of the cottage steps as he passed.

Their caution was bred from the stories that they had heard their mothers tell of children taken away and made to sell brooms and pans along the highway, by people who lived in the leafy glades of forests and paid homage to no man and respected no man's property save their own.

But he was not a gipsy, neither did he carry brooms or pans or wicker chairs turned out by the thousands in some great grey city where the fog blackens the new town hall and the fattest man in the place is called a mayor, and like some mountebank wears a great gold chain that nearly weighs him down. Nor was he a porky town councillor dreaming of municipal honours, and always well supplied with the best things in the world when sometimes the people who placed him in his municipal position had to go without, and sign forms for things they often could not get.

No, he was not such a one as these, for there was the light of some slight refinement in his eyes, and that expression had not been placed in those brown orbs by the reading of books by a Western people, who found fit to develop a new priced novel during a period of great financial stringency. He knew nothing of "Joan and Peter," or Mr. Bennett, or all the trouble caused by foolish ministers with spiritual homes in enemy countries. He was a dealer in different wares, and over his shoulder he

carried a really lovely assortment of mats—the vari-coloured kind that one collects in the East, and generally has the misfortune to get stolen, to find them, on making angry inquiries, in the house of the ruling pasha of the place.

Pashas are people with taking ways; but neither was he one of these, for the fellow was a Persian by nationality, and a carpet-seller by trade bound for Oxford, now that its professors had retired there after certain misspent years in seeking to control the war departments of a great country.

No doubt they had been on the old carpet for so long that he fancied there was a great trade to be done in new ones with them now.

He was an optimist, for generally the carpet of a professor is as shabby as his war-time suit, for he lives in the air and seldom has much idea what his feet are doing. It is only the undergraduate who really has need to regulate that portion of the anatomy.

It was a burst of laughter coming from the Merrythought Inn that drew him into that

comfortable hostelry, and naturally he found his way into the bar-parlour, where the characters of this story, whom you have met so often, were gathered.

Garge at that moment was engaged in addressing his fellow constituents on the subject of a child that had been asked to "Decline to Hatch."

"Up shot the pretty lassie's head," said Garge. "'Do you take me for a bad egg?' she promptly replied."

The story was somewhat whimsical, and it amused the newcomer, who laid his carpets down with evident care and took a seat near McAndrew, who was seated near the fire.

A little description of him might assist you to better visualize the scene. He wore a red fez, and an old pair of drab-coloured and baggy trousers, a black silk coat, and he was shod with a pair of very small brown shoes, that revealed the white socks between the end of the trouser and the top of the boot.

He was slight, and his face was brown; his hands were very thin, and he smoked a curious

kind of cigarette continuously, that is to say, he had always one either in his mouth or between his fingers.

For some little time he listened to the stories being told, and the following retailed by Terence greatly amused him.

Terence's eyes were shining with laughter as he leant forward and looked around the room.

"There are other versions of this story," he began, "but this is the original. One night many years ago they were playing a terrific melodrama (in which the characters of Wellington and Napoleon were the chief parts) in a glorified wooden booth known as a 'wooden building' near Waterford. The actors were well known in the small town, and very friendly with the patrons, and sure the patrons were also friendly, and at times somewhat familiar. During performances they frequently interrupted with their own remarks. Well, one Saturday night, salaries had been paid in full, and consequently (which was not unusual) some

of the actors were also full. Wellington came on in a front scene and began a long and trying oration. He was not even a little coherent, and the boys in the gallery—although to an extent sympathetic—were not tolerant.

“ ‘Get off, Bill,’ they shouted ; but William persevered.

“ ‘Get off, Bill, you’re drunk, be jabbers,’ came a single small, squally voice.

“ William paused, fixed the culprit with a fishy eye, and more in sorrow than in anger took a wobbly step nearer the footlights, and in the full majesty of the human voice remarked—

“ ‘Drunk, am I ? Drunk is it ? Wait till you see Nappy ! ’ ”

“ The audience must have been just as surprised as the nigger soldier I will tell you about,” put in Izzy.

“ This American nigger soldier, home on leave, was walking down a main street at his home town, when a white man who knew him stopped him and said—



"McAndrew"

“ ‘ Well, Sambo, I see you have become a soldier.’

“ ‘ Yes, me soldier,’ replied the nigger.

“ ‘ How do you like being a Doughboy, Sambo ? ’

“ ‘ No like-um.’

“ ‘ What’s the matter ? ’

“ ‘ Too much salute—not enough shoot.’

“ ‘ Of course you know what you are fighting for, Sam ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, me know,’ answered the nigger.

“ ‘ Well, what are you fighting for, Sambo ? ’

“ ‘ Make whole blame world Democratic party,’ answered the nigger.”

“ Talking about fighters,” said McAndrew, “ and the American men in particular, this is a good one.

“ A stoker serving in one of our colonial naval patrol vessels was brought before the senior officer of his parent ship for being disrespectful to his captain, who had risen from the ranks. On being asked what he had to

say, the stoker frankly acknowledged that he had transgressed, but said in defence—

“ ‘ Sir, it is very hard for me to give respect to this officer, when a few months ago I paid twenty cents to see him fired out of a gun on Coney Island.’ ”

An old sergeant had come into the bar. He was engaged on farm work, and the conversation he had heard amused him so that it reminded him of a yarn of the barrack-yard, and he told it with great relish.

“ A batch of raw recruits were up before the drill-sergeant, and as the day was rather hot, and the class more than usually stupid, his temper was rapidly rising. At last he could stand it no longer, and walking up to one perspiring private who had been going through all sorts of weird evolutions unheard of in any drill-book he rapped out furiously—

“ ‘ Wot the perishin’ Hades d’yer think you’re doing ? Are you on parade, you blankety idiot, or what ? ’ ”

“ ‘Dunno, guvnor,’ replied the other wearily, as he mopped his brow. ‘I’m beginning to think I’m a ’aunch of mutton on a jolly old meat-jack!’ ”

“Just a matter of misunderstanding,” put in Terence. “Just like an English and an Irish sailor who were in an engagement together. The former had his leg shot off and asked Pat to carry him below to the doctor. Pat picked him up, and while carrying him off another ball, unknown to Pat, carried off the Englishman’s head. Some one told Pat it was no use carrying the man to the surgeon, for his head was off.

“ ‘By my sowl,’ said Pat, ‘the fellow desaved me, sure he told me it was *his leg*.’ ”

The strange character who had come in with the carpets had taken such an interest in all that was being said that soon the eyes that had been looking at him with a semi-suspicion in them changed to a different kind of expression.

He looked about him, and in a quaint accent spoke.

“Your stories are very different from the ones we tell in my native Persia,” he said softly. “There we tell stories that do not make you laugh so much as think—it is, as you would say, a grim kind of humour. Shall I tell you the episode of the Sword of Honour?”

He waited.

“Go ahead,” said McAndrew, and all the others became very interested. The bar hushed to quietness.

“It was the great Shah El Zeman,” began the story-teller, “and of all the shahs he was famed throughout the whole country for the beauty of the women of his harem. But one there was more beautiful than any, and she he called ‘The Priceless Gem.’”

The eyes of the speaker lit up.

“How wonderful she was,” he said softly. “Her eyes when the kohl was nigh them were like twin stars that all other stars envied, and her face was of the perfect contour of the moon in its most beautiful quarter. Her waist was

small, and her hips moved with rhythm when she walked. She wore red slippers on her feet and blue satin trousers, and a little coat of red with mother-of-pearl buttons. She was dark, and her complexion was as the most beautiful of flowers.

“ Now to this houri the shah gave a wonderful pearl of great value ; he prized this almost as much as Budoor herself. This was the name of the damsel ; and one day when war called and he had to find the camp of his armies he bade her guard it with her life.

“ He had not been gone long before a stranger, hearing of the gem, came with intent to steal it, and he bribed one of the eunuchs of the guard, and this faithless servant allowed him to have access to the harem.

“ Here he came and saw Budoor, and to her he made love with the intent to steal the pearl, and steal it he did, so that she was at a loss to know how to recover it. But with all the sagacity of her kind she found a way to keep him, so that he could not take the pearl away. She sang to him and caressed

him, and thus made him, through her very love, stay at her side.

“Imagine through what a torment of fear, remorse, and sorrow the loyal damsel passed. Night after night she would weep her eyes away, but the morning found her still with the new lover, and she charmed him to forgetfulness of danger. Meanwhile she had sent a runner to her master, and in hot haste he returned, and one evening, just as the cool wind of the evening was blowing the roses o’er her head, he found his beloved, with her arms about her lover.

“As he approached she rose up, and with a despairing gesture indicated the lover and the pearl in his waistband. At once the man stood up, and with a bow he handed the gem to its owner, as though he had been protecting it for him.

“The shah smiled, and coming near to the stranger whispered that this woman here was his daughter, and that on the morrow he would give him in matrimony to the damsel.

“‘Make thyself ready at the bath,’ he said,

‘and to-morrow you shall be given, in the sight of Allah, to this child of mine. Also a sword of honour shall be presented to you, and you shall remain for ever beneath my roof.’

“The morrow came, and with it, borne in a marriage car, came Budoor, pale to her lips and sobbing. And when the ceremony of mating had been accomplished, a large and gloriously begemmed sword was handed to the shah, and he bade the stranger bend.

“With expectation in his eyes the bridegroom did as he was bade. Immediately the shah’s arm was raised and down came the blade of the sword on the wretched stranger’s neck, entirely decapitating him.”

“Bedad! Is that what they call a funny story in your land?” said Terence shortly.

The stranger smiled.

“The next day the shah’s houri was not to be found, nor the next, but on the third she was discovered. She had found her master’s sword, and lay dead with its blade through a breast that had only ever loved him, and the soul that had protected his priceless gem

had been collected to Allah, and waited in paradise for its master."

The stranger had told the story with such feeling and with such a nice selection of words that they prevailed upon him to speak yet again.

He smiled sadly.

"This remarkable fragment," he began, "was found nigh the outer walls of Bagdad, somewhere about the end of the sixteenth century, and is supposed to be an hitherto unknown writing of the great Haroun al-Raschid. Its value is unique, and the perfect expression of the words, the music of the style, is far in advance of anything Western yet written."

He spoke in musical accents.

"Oh! my Zuelika, now the apple falls, and in the gardens all is nigh to death.

No more the cassia lingers on the breeze or myrrh
be mingled with Zuelika's breath.

In old Haroun's fair garden all is drear, the fallen
leaf laments the dying year.

The houri to her carpet-covered floor has ta'en
herself now autumn is no more.

“And I, alone in winter’s crystal halls, watch the
grey skies nigh where the petal falls.

I mourn for Ali, I lament Zu Boar, and all my
friends who passed the final floor.

I think of Allah, and I pray that He in my great
solitude may come to me.

Behind in greying dusk the minaret tells me that
when I pass man will forget.

“I will away, and in the little street think of old
days and listen to the feet

Of those who passed along and took their way,
the once red buds of an old yesterday.

Here near the twinkling lights I see them come,
pauper and king. Lo! all the busy hum

Still throbs upon my brain, in stately throng the
myriad figures pass the street along.

“Here is Fatima. ‘Lift thy yashmak, sweet, that
I may bow my reverence to thy feet.’

How on the piled cushions once you lay and
charmed my soul with songs of yesterday.

Oh! kohl-eyed houri, where, ah! where art thou?

Are you like fruit that tumbles from the bough,
And screened by kindly fallen leaves is borne,
through death to a far greater harvest dawn?

“Alas, alas! the night comes to the life, just as the
flower bows before the knife.

The colour fades, and in our autumn dying we too
’midst leaves of yesteryear are lying.

Come, my Haroun, away in yonder inn the wise
ones of the world take wine drafts in.

Come and forget, for death is at the gate, forget
thy solitude—of joy partake."

There was a wonderful atmosphere in the inn when he had finished, and the time had so flown by that they were not aware that it was the moment to go until the good host warned them. The stranger was the first to leave, they heard his footsteps in the road without as he commenced his walk through the night to Oxford—the seat of learning and the breeding-ground of two things that help to dismember great nations—the Church and Politics !

CHAPTER SEVEN

“ SCROGGINS ”

The joke that helps the folk to laugh
Is better than the dose by half ;
For if you've got a pain to-day,
A laugh will take that ache away.

WILLIAM OF AYLESBURY, 1249.

WITHOUT in the little old road that wound away through the village the wind was howling and the rain was coming down just as it can come down when the year wanes to its close, and you get that nasty little cold that tells you that it's time you put your winter underwear on.

How different the interior of this old inn, with its cheery fire burning in the large grate, and the music of laughter giving a fitting

prelude to the symphony of clinking glasses and merry badinage.

As you say, my masters, that is nicely put ; but not near so nicely as some of the stories that, if you keep your ears well open, you are soon to hear.

About the rough wooden table in the centre of the bar was that little group of friends who by now seem almost as brothers to those who are reading this book. Here is seated McAndrew, and next to him the laughing Terence, whilst Izzy is looking at Garge, who is just about to tell, as Lord Alfred FitzNoodle, of the 18th Umpshires, would say, "A perfectly priceless story, old thing !"

"Yes," said Garge, "there was the little lad crying fit to break his heart out in the street yonder, so I went up to him and asked him what was the matter.

" 'Faver and muvver are fighting,' he said tearfully.

" 'Well, sonny, and who is your father ? ' I asked.

"The laddie looked up.

" 'That's just what they're fighting about, sir,' he replied."

This plaintive little story having elicited a burst of really ungenerous applause, it fell to those seated about to think out some story or other that had to do with a little boy. You know how the mind runs. You invariably try and go one better than the last speaker, give him his own stuff back with interest, as it were. From this fact sprung that wonderful war-time phrase, "That's the stuff to give 'em," meaning really, "Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

That is really one of the benefits of war: it brings out the artistic side in all nations, and gives them all a healthy and growing income tax.

McAndrew was the first to remember a story that he could tell to destroy Garge's sudden won popularity, and this is the yarn he told. And it's a good story, too.

A fussy old fellow met a little lad smoking

a cigarette stump. He offered to give him a penny if he would throw it away, which the youngster promptly did.

“ After a short lecture against the evils of smoking the old man gave the boy the copper and walked on.

“ Shortly afterwards he was somewhat surprised to meet the lad again smoking another cigarette.

“ ‘ Come, Johnny,’ said he, ‘ didn’t I give you a penny just now to throw a cigarette away ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ said the boy, ‘ an’ I’ve bin an’ bought a couple o’ good ones with it.’ ”

But Garge was not to be outdone. Garge had a few up his sleeve, and he showed that he was versatile as well.

“ The workman was digging by the side of the road when the officious stranger of the inquiring turn of mind stopped him.

“ ‘ My friend,’ he began, ‘ I should very much like to know what you’re digging for ! ’

“ ‘Money!’ replied the navvy laconically, as he paused.

“ ‘You don’t say so!’ came the astonished reply. ‘And when do you expect to find it?’

“ ‘Saturday morning, you perishin’ fule!’ answered the yokel as he resumed his work.”

Izzy being the first man to laugh had naturally a good three seconds start, for the next story when the laughter had subsided.

“Here is a new one, I think, not one of my usual ones.”

Then he told it excellently well in characteristic Northern dialect.

“A young mill-operative who fell in love with a maid-servant got himself up in his Sunday best and called upon the maiden’s mother to ask permission to pay his attentions to the object of his affections.

“He was a handsome young chap, and in every way likely to make a good husband, but he was nevertheless received very coolly by the parent.

“ ‘ Well, doan’t ye care for me, mum ? ’ he asked, after submitting to a searching and careful scrutiny.

“ ‘ No,’ answered the mother, with decision.

“ ‘ Why not ? Ah’m getting good wages. Ah’m not a boozier, an’ Ah spends my neets at hoam.’ ”

“ ‘ Happen tha does,’ grunted the old woman, ‘ but tha wears collars an’ cuffs, an’ that doan’t suit me at all. Ah’m never going to let it be said ’at my girl married a dandy—not me.’ ”

At that moment there entered the bar a tall, somewhat sinister-looking gentleman upon whose head was a battered bowler, and about whose somewhat bowed shoulders was a coat that had no doubt seen better days on less worthy backs. It looked as though some poor relative had hoped to look a fine bird at the decease of a richer one, but that instead of looking the bird he had got it.

The first impression of this gentleman was altered though when he opened his mouth and

asked for a pint of beer. Somehow at this moment there came a rapt look in his eyes, and his face glowed with anticipation. He had heard the last story, and the story had seemed to leave him unmoved, but there was humour behind his Cromwellian countenance, and in deep sepulchral tones he began.

“He lived up in Lancashire, and, like so many of the good sports up there, he was very keen on racing of every kind. And one day a friend of his presented him with a fine whippet, and being very anxious to try its paces he let loose a rabbit and dispatched the dog in pursuit. But unfortunately in a few minutes both the whippet and rabbit were lost to sight; so after a short wait the owner decided to go after them. After crossing three fields, he came upon a rustic leaning up against a gate.

“‘Hi, my friend,’ he exclaimed, ‘have you seen a rabbit and a whippet go past within the last few minutes?’

“‘Aye!’ replied the yokel stolidly. ‘A see’d ’em go past, few minutes ago, and whippet were leading by a couple o’ yards!’”

He didn't laugh at his yarn. He simply drained his tankard, and laying it down looked solemnly about him.

"Gentlemen," he said softly, "you see before you one who might have been more had he wished, and would have been less had the world had its way."

"Poor old chap," whispered Garge.

"My confederates in liquor," continued the newcomer, "I am an actor, and I know many stories. Indeed, for some time I was employed in a chestnut factory pulling the nuts out of the fire of ages, and serving them up on new dishes for an ignorant populace."

He flicked the dust from the end of an execrable cigarette, and pushed back his lank hair that crawled as though for breath from below a time-worn bowler.

"Here," he went on, "is a story that has stood the test of time as well as some men on the unrepentant side of fifty wear their first white hairs. It is a pathetic story, full of the simplicity of the countryside. Let me tell it, though.

“At a certain little hamlet in the heart of the country, a commercial traveller who had come down from town was interviewing the old farmer in his stable-yard. While they were talking together one of the farm hands passed. The business man looked at him.

“‘I see that chap of yours has lost an ear,’ he remarked.

“‘‘E ’as,’ replied the farmer laconically.

“‘Accident, I suppose?’

“‘Noa, it weren’t an accident.’

“‘Fight, then?’

“‘Noa, it weren’t a fight.’

“‘Then how on earth did he do it?’

“The farmer spat out the end of the straw he had been chewing.

“‘‘E just ’ad an argeyment!’ he remarked stolidly.”

Quite a good story, and every one was impressed by the taking manners of the new-comer. He had already taken half a pint of McAndrew’s beer, and Garge, looking up, asked the fellow’s name.

“ My name is Scroggins,” came the reply, “ Theophilus Antoninus Scroggins, very much at your service. I was named first after my great-grandfather, who had the honour to be the last man hung for sheep-stealing; and to temper this discretion and to bring virtue ever to my mind the Antoninus was given to me as I so resembled the great Marcus a few days after birth. Believe me, those two names have been my undoing. I am constantly trying to sink the Theophilus in the Antoninus and vice versa. I fear Marcus surrenders most.

“ But to continue with the merriment, sir,” he added, “ is there no one else who can cap my yarn with a better, for I fain would hear a good story, and to-night I mean to let the old Theophilus have a priority certificate to my character ? ”

A little man in the corner cleared his throat and looking about the bar tendered this tale.

“ During a bad storm at sea, when all hope of saving the vessel by human means had been abandoned, the captain informed

the passengers that they must now be prepared to 'trust in Providence,' on which one of their number—a clergyman—exclaimed—

“ ‘ Good Heavens ! has it come to that ? ’ ”

Theophilus Antoninus sighed deeply. “ It was ever so,” he said, amid the laughter that followed, “ those who lead us let us down.

“ It calls to my mind,” he continued, “ the observation of an American soldier made in one of my old haunts, the Strand.

“ ‘ Might your name be John Smith ? ’ he asked of a stranger to the Metropolis.

“ ‘ Well, yes, it might,’ was the reply ; ‘ but it *ain’t*, not by a long chalk ! ’ ”

After this, and a few more pints, Scroggins lapsed into alcoholic somnolence, leaving the field to McAndrew, who had suddenly remembered a story that had been seeking to evade his memory the whole evening.

“ A persevering young Sunday-school teacher was giving her pupils a lesson on the Ten Commandments. All was going along without

a hitch until she came to the seventh, when, with a deprecating little cough, she remarked—

" ' We will pass on to the eighth now, my dears, as you are too young to understand the seventh. '

" ' Oh, but please, teacher, ' murmured a wee voice from one of the rear rows, ' I understand all about it. Father's just got seven days for doing it with the milk. ' "

Garge was particularly tickled by this yarn, as he knew something about the village pump and its various uses, and the inspiration of humour brought another farming story to his memory.

" The traveller was calling on the farmer, and doing his level best to do business in something, " Garge began.

" ' Look here, ' he said at last, ' we're bringing out a cheap line in bicycles. I'll sell you one for four pounds. '

" ' Think I'd sooner have a cow, ' remarked the farmer.

" ' Possibly, ' replied the business man, ' but

then think how silly you'd look riding round town on a cow.'

" 'I'd look a greater sight more foolish tryin' to milk a bicycle, my lad,' and the discussion closed."

And so the yarning went on, with some good and some bad, and the laughter became so loud that it awoke Theophilus Antoninus Scroggins, who had almost gone to sleep over a pint of the best, and with that sudden control that is the prerogative of members of artistic professions he pulled himself together and flashed out the following. One might almost use the description of a well-known novelist: he sopranoed in tenor tones this bass yarn—

"A millionaire profiteer 'passed away' and was buried, and his host of employees attended the funeral. His will had been a peculiar one, for many reasons—apart from the fact that six short years ago he had been a bankrupt—and amongst its peculiarities was the ceremonial desired by the departed for his obsequies. He was, it seemed, to be buried

in full kit: new frock-coat, patent-leather boots, gold watch and chain, diamond rings, scarf-pin, and, to crown all, in his best set of false teeth. All of which his workmen knew and discussed as they gathered round the grave.

“‘The joolery an’ the clothes I could understand, Bert,’ said one of them to his chum; ‘the old ’un always set a heap on his appearance; but what did he want wi’ his teeth?’”

“‘Huh,’ grunted Bert, ‘nice sort of mug ’e’d ha’ looked when he got to the weepin’ and wailin’ and gnashin’ shop an’ him with no teeth.’”

“Talking about teeth,” said a man named Atkinson, a commercial traveller staying at the “Merrythought,” “one wants pretty good molars to chew the stuff you get nowadays, especially at them restaurants up in Lunnon.

“That reminds me of an incident I saw.” “It might have been shell-shock that afflicted the subject of my story, it might have been just nerves, but the fact remains that he suddenly beckoned the head waiter to his table.

“ ‘For the love of goodness,’ he cried fiercely, ‘stop that infernal orchestra! I can’t hear myself think.’ ”

“The waiting one glanced discreetly round the room.

“ ‘I am sorry, sir,’ he murmured regretfully, ‘but at present the room is far too full. You see, with so many people taking the ordinary table d’hôte the management can’t afford to have them sitting and thinking about nothing but their food.’ ”

McAndrew had just ordered a whisky, and Terence was “pulling his leg” about the Scotchman and the whisky-bottle when Izzy had a brain wave.

“An inqueth had been held on the body of a Scotchman,” he began, “who had been drowned, and all the evidence pointed to suicide. For some time after the coroner had summed up the jury put their heads together to consider their verdict. At length the foreman rose.

“ ‘Death from unknown causes,’ he exclaimed emphatically.

“ ‘ I don’t agree with your verdict,’ said the coroner. ‘ You practically had direct evidence that the deceased was thence to throw himthelf into the river.’ ”

“ ‘ Yeth, sir,’ replied the foreman sullenly, ‘ but taking into conthideration that the deceased was a Scotchman, and that a full bottle of whisky was found on his body, we think a verdict of suicide absolutely untenable.’ ”

Stories were still being told fast and furiously when that moment came when the hearts of some men feel a pang of regret, and the impotence of human nature to put back the clock is brought home to one.

Came the regulation hour for ceasing to sell stimulating refreshment.

Slowly the bar cleared, one of the first to go being Theophilus Antoninus Scroggins, and as the others came into the thin drizzle that was falling and the blustering wind they could hear his parting benediction adown the road along which he was travelling.

“ O blessed, blessed night, I am afeard,”

he voiced, "That being in night all this is but a dream, Too flattering sweet to be substantial."

That was the last they heard of "Romeo," for the next minute the wind had chased his voice away, and the black shadows had crowded over him.

He was lost to view—and the others went silently homeward.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NIGHT OF MIRTH

Laugh at the sea fiend, laugh at the wave ;
Laugh at the gale, lads, laugh at the grave ;
Laugh just for happiness, for laughter brings
Health to the heart, son—richer than kings'.

PETER THE MARINER, 1744.

EVIDENTLY the shade of the old actor was still abroad in the Merrythought Inn when the old doors clanked to on their time-worn hinges, and bolt and bar gave the last noisy echoes of business to the night.

Soon there was silence, save where an ancient bench creaked in memory of a past joke or a stair gave out that noise that makes us think of stealthy footsteps and phantom figures.

In this case it was not only thought, for there *were* phantom figures abroad. They had

come from the distant roadway, and were crowding now into the old bar parlour.

Jostling, laughing ghosts full of merriment, for to-night the fast was over and there was a chance to let fall the mask of severity and prayer and put on the cap and bells.

Ambrose was well to the front with a story when the company had assembled, and he told a yarn that for whimsicality and philosophy it would be hard to beat.

“A coffin,” began Ambrose, “that contained the affectionate wife of a mourning husband was being borne to the churchyard in a certain country cemetery in the south of Scotland, when it accidentally struck against the corner of a wall, in consequence of which circumstance the ‘deceased’ was aroused from a trance, and lived for several years afterwards. When the poor woman really died a few years later, in the act of passing the same spot, the husband anxiously exclaimed to the bearers of the coffin—

“‘Tak’ tent o’ the corner this time!’”

“What I am going to tell now,” said Anselm, when the laughter had subsided, “took place at a small grocery shop, where they sold everything, from cheese to a diamond tiara. George, the farmer, had gone for some liniment to rub on his cow’s bad leg. The foolish grocer gave the old farmer, however, some scent instead of liniment.

“The day following, he came back in a great rage.

“‘Look here,’ he said to the grocer, ‘I wish you’d be more careful how you pass things over that counter. You gave me lavender water yesterday instead of embrocation, and I’d put it on the blessed cow before I realized.’

“‘I hope it hasn’t done her any harm,’ said the grocer in a humbled tone.

“‘Harm be blowed!’ shouted the farmer. ‘That ’ere cow won’t eat now, nor allow herself to be milked. The only thing she does is to sigh the whole day long and go look at her reflection in the pond.’”

“I know a very good story that was told

to me by one of the spirits of an old church nearby," said Dunstan softly, looking around him with that benign gaze that had so won him affection in the old days.

"A touring theatrical company found themselves stranded in a tiny northern town, where, try as they would, they were unable to find diggings of any kind. At last in desperation one of them was chosen to call on the rector of the parish in the hope that he could suggest some place. To their relief, the cleric informed them that he had a long since disused church which he would only be too pleased to place at their disposal. And, being at their wits' end, they accepted the offer and adjourned *en masse* to the nearest hostelry. Then in the grey dawn of the following morning the parish clerk was awakened by the furious ringing of the old church bell. In haste, he pulled on his clothes and rushed to the building.

"Ten minutes later the rector, who had also hurried to the scene of action, met the clerk returning disconsolately.

“ ‘What was all that ringing for?’ he inquired hurriedly.

“ ‘Those blamed actors,’ growled the clerk. ‘Number four pew was ringing for three gins hot and a bottle of stout!’ ”

“It is the children’s stories that interest me,” said Botolph merrily, “especially those that deal with chastisement. There was one young hopeful who was always getting into trouble. He had just had his weekly pocket-money cut off for some misdemeanour or other.

“ ‘Father,’ he said, ‘is it true that when you beat me it pains you more than it hurts me?’ ”

“ ‘Yes, my lad,’ said his father.

“ ‘Then,’ quoth the lad, ‘get to work quickly and give me the biggest thrashing you know how—’cos I’m dashed annoyed with you!’ ”

Then Oswald told a story about the Hebrew race, and a good story it is. This is a sincere chronicle of it.

“One Jew took another to a friend’s house to dinner. When the function was over and they came away, one said to the other—

“‘I thay, Ikey, I am rather thurprised at the vay you behaved at the table.’

“‘Vot’s the matter? What did I do wrong?’ said the other.

“‘Vell,’ said Moses, ‘you know I athked you to behave yourself and act properly.’

“‘Yeth,’ said Ikey, ‘I know you did. But vot did I do wrong? Vy don’t you tell me that?’

“‘Vell, look at you! You ate your asparagus with your fingers,’ retorted Moses.

“‘Oy, oy,’ said Ikey dolefully. ‘Vas that asparagus? I thought it vas spinach.’”

“That is not half so funny, Oswald, as the one I will tell even now,” said Ambrose, chuckling at his thoughts. “There was an examining teacher sounding the intelligence of a school, and her first remark was—

“‘I’ll give this bright new sixpence to the

little boy or girl who gives the best answer to a question I shall ask.'

"A real stir of interest rewarded this statement, and all eyes were fixed intently on the visitor as she beamingly continued—

" 'The question is: Who do you love the best? '

"A hundred more or less clean little hands shot up into the air.

" 'I love father the best,' announced one youngster.

" 'I love my mother the best,' jerkily responded the second.

" 'Both very good answers,' snuffled the donor of the sixpence. 'Now, you little boy, what do you say? '

" 'I love the Saviour the best,' was the quiet reply.

" 'Excellent! That was the answer I wanted,' said the visitor. 'Here is the sixpence. And now, little friend, what is your name? '

" 'Moses Levy,' said the sharp youth, pocketing the 'ready.' "

Chrysostom, who had been listening with interest, now looked up.

“There was,” he began, “a clergyman who was mounted on a tall, raw-boned animal, and he asked a dirty child which was the nearer way to town. The boy said—

“ ‘ Who are you, old fellow ? ’ ”

“The clergyman replied: ‘ My son, I am a follower of the Lord.’ ”

“ ‘ A follower of the Lord, eh ! well, it makes mighty little difference which road you take, you’ll never catch him with that horse.’ ”

“ I like the personal anecdote,” put in Anselm. “ There is a very good one that I remember about Alexander Dumas, whom you will all remember as a French writer who was born several centuries after we died.

“ An inquisitive man said to Dumas : ‘ You are a quadroon ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I believe I am, sir,’ said Dumas.

“ ‘ And your father ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Was a mulatto.’ ”

“ ‘ And your grandfather ? ’ ”

“ ‘Negro,’ hastily answered the dramatist.

“ ‘And may I inquire what your great-grandfather was ? ’

“ ‘An ape, sir,’ thundered Dumas ; ‘yes, sir, an ape ; my pedigree commences where yours terminates.’ ”

“ I heard a very good story about a soldier,” said Augustine quietly. “ It is about the Great War, and the man to whom I refer was new to the battlefield, and was particularly anxious to get rid of the old soldier who was tiring him with terrible stories of what was in store for him.

“ ‘Well, good-night, old chap ; thanks very much for your advice,’ he yawned, ‘an’ for Heaven’s sake don’t slam the tent door.’ ”

“ Here is a very good reply made to an ambitious woman,” said Ambrose.

“ This young lady, whose good looks were equal to her bluntness in conversation, was calling at a house where other guests were assembled, among them the eldest son of a

rich manufacturer, who was commonly looked upon as a very eligible husband. The conversation turned on matrimonial troubles.

“ ‘I hold that the correct thing for the husband is to begin as he intends to go on,’ said the young man. ‘Say that the question was one of smoking. Almost immediately I would show my intentions by lighting a cigar and settling the question for ever.’

“ ‘And I would knock the thing out of your mouth!’ cried the imperious damsel.

“ ‘Do you know,’ rejoined the young man, smiling blandly, ‘I don’t think you would be there!’ ”

“ ‘I know a monk who was secreted in spirit form in a business house,’ said Dunstan. “ ‘Why he was there I cannot say, unless it was to smell the fumes of some excellent old wine that they possessed, and he overheard the proprietor say—

“ ‘Our business has been established since 1856. We have pleased and displeased people ever since. We have made money and lost money. We have been cussed and discussed,

knocked about, talked about, lied about, held up, knocked down, robbed, etc., to the end of the chapter. The only reason we are staying in business is to see what the hell will happen next.' ”

“ One of the last stories reminds me of the innocence of children, which is wonderful,” said Edmund, “ and this tale is a very fine example of this.

“ In the household in which little Dolly resided, she understood that when anything was worn out, broken or otherwise in disfavour by the family, it was replaced by something new.

“ One day her elder sister came in with the glad tidings—

“ ‘ The Joneses have a new baby ! ’

“ Little Dolly looked up. ‘ Why, what was the matter wiv the ovver one ? ’ ”

The subject of stories turned to those of divorce, and a lively argument on the sad way in which modern civilization had accepted

divorce with such readiness was brought to a close by Botolph telling the story of a much-divorced woman who was walking along Regent Street when she was greeted by a gentleman whose visage seemed somewhat familiar to her.

“ ‘How do you do?’ he said. ‘I’m so delighted to see you after all these years!’ ”

“ ‘How d’ye do,’ she answered. ‘I’m sure I ought to know you. Let me see—wasn’t I married to you once upon a time?’ ”

“I have heard a good yarn about a certain inebriated gentleman,” said Chrysostom. “This man had been dining unwisely and was far from home; so his sensible friend thought he had better sit down quietly in one of those modern picture-shows for a bit, and get over it.

“In a little while he was found to be weeping quietly to himself, though it was certainly not a pathetic picture that was flickering across the screen.

“ ‘What’s the matter?’ hissed his friend. ‘Why can’t you sit quiet and look at the picture?’ ”

“ ‘ ‘Sno good, ol’ man,’ sobbed the inebriated one. ‘I’ve gone stone deaf. I can’t hear a single word they’re saying!’ ”

It was Ambrose’s turn to tell an anecdote, and he told the following in such an innocent way that it was greatly appreciated.

“ A mother gave her little boy a couple of doughnuts the other day, telling him to divide with his sister. A few moments later the little sister came in crying as if her heart would break, and, when asked what was the matter, she sobbingly exclaimed—

“ ‘ Bobby comed out wif the donu’s, an’ said for me to wait till he had eaten the outside an’ he would give me the holes. Then he lost the holes, an’ I didn’t have any.’ ”

“ I foretell that there is to be another General Election amongst mortals in this country soon,” said Botolph. “ I can’t understand the ways of these humans these days, how soon they are able to fall in with the old ways that obtained before the war.”

“Reminds me of a tale,” said Edmund shortly.

“The victorious Coalition candidate was speaking to his constituents after the election was all over.

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ he exclaimed, ‘we have had a hard fight, but it has been a clean fight, and I am in every way satisfied with the result. If I were to use a simile I should say that I feel as happy as a bride who has wooed and won!’ ”

“Then up rose the defeated candidate.

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I must thank the last speaker for his courteous remarks. Upon the straightness of the fight in general and of his methods in particular there can be no question, but were I to be allowed to borrow his metaphor I think I should liken myself rather to a widow who, while satisfied, is a trifle disappointed.’ ”

And the jokes went flying around whilst such a laughter resounded in the bar-parlour that the mice flew for the friendly shelter of their

holes, and even a screech owl ceased to make the night hideous so that he could listen to all the good fun going on where these spirit forms were having their night together.

"What humour is about to-night," said a bird that was trying to sleep in the eaves of the inn. "There must be a good joke on downstairs. Strange! Are the people still up?"

"Chirrup," said his friend. "Those aren't people. Those are the old fellows we sometimes see through our half-closed eyes when night comes."

"What! Those old scoundrels," said his friend. "I shall be glad when the dawn comes so that I can get a wink of sleep."

Just then a cock began to crow, and the first tints of a new day crept up over the edge of the world.

"Here we are again," said Sol, a few minutes later, as he smiled at the world, and the moon got so frightened that it disappeared in the distance just as quickly as Ambrose, Edmund, Anselm and his friends darted off to their secret rest in the old foundations.

CHAPTER NINE

"SOME" STORIES

If luck is out and days are bad
And friends are few ! well ! why be sad ?
Look at the wives Solomon had,
Think on your luck, *then* son,—be glad !
AUGUSTUS BLOGGINS, 1458.

"I HAVE often marvelled," said Garge, one evening in the Merrythought Inn, "at the fund of humour that there is to be found in the streets of Lunnon."

McAndrew blew out a puff of smoke and, finishing his glass of ale, agreed.

"There's humour abounding in all cities," he said softly, "and especially amongst those who ply their trade in the highways."

Terence looked up.

"Reminds me of a story I heard only yesterday," he put in. "It was to'd me by a man

who, during the last Taxi strike, paused reminiscently in front of a line of growlers and hansom cabs."

"He was struck," continued Terence, "by the meagre nature of the animals' muscles, and a feeling of great remorse came into my friend's heart at the truly pitiful sight.

"A whim took him that he would test the intelligence of these ancient beasts, and, procuring a sausage from the kindly individual who ran the adjacent cabman's shelter, he put this sausage in the road, just behind the last cab."

"At last an elderly gentleman who wished to revive the pleasures of his youth got into the first cab and was driven away. Automatically the cabs moved up and—would you believe it——?"

"What!" said Garge. "The sausage moved up as well."

"No!" answered Terence. "One of those arabs of the street picked up the sausage and bolted, calling my friend a food-hoarder as he ran."

Terence smiled at the manner in which he had pulled Garge's expansive leg as McAndrew cleared his throat.

"I shall never forget a 'bus driver I came across recently," he said, smiling.

"He was observing a fellow 'bus conductor handing a baby down to its mother. Suddenly he leaned forward over his wheel. 'Drop it and see if it'll bounce, Bill,' he said wittily."

"Talking about buses," said Izzy. "The other day I was on an omnibus going down the Strand when I noticed that the conductor *would* come on the top and waggle a piece of string behind the driver's ear.

"It was one of the old horse buses brought out for an airing, you know.

"At first the driver took no notice, but as the man repeated the action he let out and tried to strike the fellow. Again and again he struck out until the conductor went below. As I got off I paused near the conductor and drew attention to his act and the unchivalrous way in which his mate had responded.

“ ‘Yus, guv’nor,’ he said to me, ‘some blokes ’ave no sense of ’umour; ’is brother was ’ung this morning.’ ”

The infinite humour of the above, and the wealth of good merriment that was circulating brought forth many a story, and the following told by McAndrew is not without interest.

“Imagine,” began McAndrew, “a most beautiful house set in the most glorious spot in a country district. Flowers bloom in profusion in the garden, all red and gold and green. The house itself a veritable palace in white stone with a high sun making the windows blaze with its dying glory. To this house there comes a tramp, and opening the little garden gate he goes up the neatly swept path and notices as he goes the wealth and splendour of the place. He sees the canary in the large window on the right. The glimpse of a woman’s fair head greets his eyes. He pauses on the steps.

“ ‘Gawd bless the master of this ’ouse,’ he says humbly, and waits, but seconds pass, and

no answer; then, 'Gawd bless the mistress of this 'ouse,' but still no answer; then in desperation, 'Gawd bless the little canary bird singing so joyful-like in the window of this 'ouse'; but silence—silence profound—greeted his charitable remarks; then in a burst of the most refined type of rage he goes into the garden and stamps on the pansies."

The picture that McAndrew's story presented greatly amused the company, and the Scot was just about to tell another when there entered the bar a gentleman whose nationality was evidenced by the little flag he wore in his coat.

He was an American, and the man who entered with him wore extraordinary clothes also.

"Waal," began the first comer, "if you guys are yarning guess I can tell a few myself.

"A lawyer in Boston, addressing his client, fixed his glasses and looked sternly at him, then :—

"'Did you present your account to the defendant?' he asked sharply.

"'I did,' replied the client.

"'And what did he say?' asked the lawyer.

" 'He told me to go to the devil,' was the answer.

" 'Waal, and what did you do then?' said the lawyer, keenly searching his face.

" 'Why, then—I came to you,' said the client tersely.

" 'That's not a bad story, is it?' said the teller, as his friend, ordering a glass of whisky, looked about him.

" 'I was at a circus show in little old Jacksonville,' he said, "and a lion-tamer of the fair sex brought a lion into the cage and allowed the beast to gracefully take a lump of sugar from her mouth.

" 'Great applause followed this brave act.

" 'I can do that, too!' cried a young farmer from the front row of the audience.

" 'You?' said the lion's bride, with some show of scorn.

" 'Certainly,' replied Hayseed, 'just as well as the lion!'

American humour was warming up, and the four companions in wit welcomed the merriment.

"I know a good one about a maid," said McAndrew.

"The harsh mistress of the big house called this girl into the dining-room. The maid, foreseeing trouble, stopped near the door.

" 'Now, Mabel,' said the mistress, 'I have a complaint to make.'

" 'Oh, yes, marm,' faltered the nervous girl.

" 'How is it that I saw you entertaining friends in the kitchen last night?'

" 'I expect it was because you looked through the keyhole,' replied Mabel.

"She knew she would get nothing more than her notice," added McAndrew.

"There was a foreman of a large foundry in Chicago, who was very short of hands," said the first American, keeping the ball rolling.

"One morning, as a last resource, he went to an old vagrant who was having a 'doss' at one of the furnaces, and roused him up with the following :

" 'I say, my good fellow, are you wanting work?'

" 'What kind of work?' asked the tramp.

" 'Can you do anything with a shovel?' "

" 'Yes,' replied the tramp, rubbing his eyes ;
' I could fry a piece of ham on it.' "

" I know a better reply than that," said his friend. " I overheard it out West."

" 'So you think the author of this play will live, do you?' a tourist asked a theatrical manager in my Far Western town.

" 'Yes,' replied the owner of the Gulch Opera House. ' He's got a five-mile start, and I don't think the boys can catch him.' "

Terence smiled. " There were two girls chatting together about love," he began.

" 'Was your love affair romantic?' asked the first, with interest.

" 'Oh, very!' the second replied; ' I met Dick at the seashore. We both pretended to be very rich.'

" 'Yes, yes,' prompted her friend.

" 'And now it turns out that he collects the payments on our piano,' came the reply."

" 'Minds me of two men who were talking of their sons,' put in McAndrew.

" 'How does your boy Ben like his job in the city ? ' said one.

" 'First-rate,' replied the other. ' He knows more about the business than the man that owns it.'

" ' Who told you that ? ' asked the first.

" ' Ben did,' was the reply. ' All he's got to do now is to convince the boss of it, an' get promoted.' "

The speakers had been so busy telling their jokes that they had not noticed a curious-looking individual who was standing in the stone-paved passage looking with large and longing eyes at the nectar in the glasses.

He seemed to be one of those individuals condemned to hover in the background of life. He was middle-aged, but looked young, and wore a shabby old morning-coat of some dead fashion.

His collar had long since gone the way that collars go when the stud-holes break and there

are no nimble fingers to tend them with the ready thread.

He wore a black squash felt hat and a look of gloom, which both sought to conceal the real distinction of his face. His boots were old, and over one fell a ragged sock.

“ Your pardon, gentlemen,” he said at last. “ But finding myself in the near neighbourhood of happy voices I ventured to think that I might avail myself of not only pleasant converse but of some slight merriment as well.”

He paused as the surprised occupants of the bar-parlour looked at this truly peculiar individual.

McAndrew smiled.

“ The tellers of good stories are always welcome here,” he said. “ This is the Parliament of Fun, and we are sitting.”

“ That I observe, sir,” said the stranger. “ And I note also that you are drinking. Now, if I——”

“ Will you have a drink ? ” put in Terence. The new-comer bowed.

“ You are a man of discernment, sir,” he

answered. "I must hasten to accept your generous offer."

A pint of stout was ordered, and when he had drank deeply from the generous tankard he laid it down.

"I, gentlemen," he said, "am a poet, and by that talent I live—I have not lived well lately."

He sighed.

"Can you rhyme with ease," put in McAndrew. "For I ever loved a good poem."

Izzy leaned forward.

"I'll wager you another pint," he said, "that you cannot write for us a poem on that immortal phrase of George Graves, 'He eats his young.'"

The poet smiled.

"You ask but a little," he said. "I will treat the subject in a pathetic manner, but will also give to it a domestic nature suitable to our own times."

He paused for a moment and looked about him as though getting inspiration from the company in so doing.

Then he began :

"He eats his young ; poor fellow, his complaint
Shows not environment, but acquired taste.
The ration system drove him there—
His young were fair.

He eats his young ; dear Mabel's in the larder.
She was just seven, and what makes it harder
Is that Mother went to Heaven e'er he had begun
To eat his young.

How boastful is he too of coupons never used ;
By drinking bath-water he's never boozed ;
And little Jackie dies
To-morrow at sunrise.

His eaten young in no sweet churchyard lie
With chocolate-coloured eyes towards the sky ;
No, no, the family of Hubbard
Rest in the proper place—their father's cupboard.

"That, sirs," he said, "although tinged with
tragedy, is a reasonably good enough set of
verses with which to win a pint of stout——"

They did not hear him, for they were too
convulsed with laughter, and during their merri-
ment the poet drained his tankard and waited
longingly for its replenishment.

He was a truly engaging fellow, this bard, and he kept them regaled with such a fund of real humour that they voted him an acquisition to the evening.

One little conception of his, that he told with infinite sympathy, is so original and so suited to old and young alike that it is worthy of inclusion in these chronicles, and will be found in the next chapter, if the generous reader will but pass on.

CHAPTER TEN

THE LITTLE BROWN MAN

This is the Poet's little story told to me at the Merrythought Inn, which story I have faithfully taken down as he told it.—A. G.

THE fairy in the Canterbury-bell looked up at the Rose-fairy and laughed.

“The little Brown Man came again last night,” she said. “He was painting the pansies.”

Below the flower another flower opened, and the small and sweetly musical voice of the Pansy joined in the conversation.

“Yes,” said the Pansy-fairy, “that is quite true. You see, I was getting a little faded, so he took pity upon me.”

“Who is the little Brown Man?” said the Rose-fairy quietly. “There are one or two of my petals that have become very faded, and

perhaps he would paint them for me. Would you tell him, Pansy, if he comes again to-night ? ”

Just then a Sparrow hopped down from where the apple-blossom was, and he looked up at the Rose.

“ Brown Man won’t come to-night,” he said. “ I was in the forest just now, and he was sitting on a fallen tree and saying, ‘ No good, no good.’ I rather think that his ideas of making you all perfect have gone wrong. He seemed very unhappy.”

Just then the Sparrow saw a worm, so off it hopped.

“ Sparrow speaks the truth,” said an old Owl on a nearby tree. “ Brown Man won’t paint any more.”

At that the Rose-fairy bent her head, and the Canterbury-bell tried to ring but could not, and the Pansy looked very miserable.

“ What is that noise ? ” she said at last.

“ Oh,” replied the old Owl, “ that noise is the sound of drums, and don’t you hear the feet ? All the mortals seem to be marching

away somewhere. I can't understand it, and I am wise enough. You ask the Eagle."

"I don't like that noise," put in the Canterbury-bell. "People who come in the garden now never hear my bell."

"They never look at me now," said the Rose-fairy; "but perhaps if the little Brown Man——"

"Yes, perhaps that's it," said the Hollyhock-fairy; "perhaps we are losing our loveliness."

"A girl touched me very tenderly only the other day," said the Rose. "But there was no one to pluck me and place me near her heart. It is so strange, I can't understand it."

The Sparrow, with the worm safely digested, hopped back.

"You are all too conceited," he said. "If you didn't think yourself so pretty some one would admire you."

"The Sparrow always was a foolish bird," said the Owl from its branch. "They have no powers of reason—but Rose, have you heard that there is a new, a strange bird to be seen at nights now?"

"He thinks that's news," said the Sparrow. "Why, the Night-jar was speaking of that bird quite a time ago. It makes a noise like the bee, only much louder, but it is very ugly."

"Well, well," said the Owl, "I do not mind; I always have this tree, and so I don't worry."

"But the Brown Man," said the Pansy. "Do you think you could ask him to paint the Rose-fairy, Sparrow?"

The Sparrow cocked its head and smiled. "I'll fly back to the wood if you like, but I hardly think it's likely."

When he had gone a Frog came out of the grass and looked up at the Hollyhock.

"Nice evening," he said; "I like the damp grass." Then he jumped back again.

"Poor conversationalist, isn't he?" said the Owl.

"Useful, though," said the Rose-fairy, as she covered her face with her petals and leaned for support against the Hollyhock.

"I do miss that girl," she said wearily, "and I am afraid that I am fading."

There came a little whirr of wings, and the Sparrow fluttered down.

"You nearly knocked me over," said the Owl; "I do wish you would look where you are going."

The Sparrow took no notice.

"The Brown Man was crying," he said sadly. "I can't understand it."

His voice was drowned by the sound of a drum, and then a long clear note, and afterwards a sound, a terrific sound that none of the flower-fairies could understand.

"Perhaps the little Brown Man will change his mind," said the Canterbury-bell softly. "One day I feel that we shall all be more lovely."

The Rose-fairy sighed, and the Pansy dropped off to sleep.

The Sparrow hopped off to a little tree, and putting its little head in the brown down about its neck, forgot all the talk of the flower-fairies.

Away in the depths of the forest the little Brown Man bent lovingly over a box of fairy

brushes, and when he had looked at them a long time he carefully packed them in a box of dreams, and bound them round with some idle fancies.

"Sad," he said; "very sad."

Then he wandered away, away from the forest and out on to the plains.

"I must get away from those drums and that terrible noise," he said.

He found a place that was very, very cold, and rolling himself in the snow he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was daytime and the sun was shining.

"It must be time I got back," he said as he picked up his box and hurried off; and through the snow he journeyed until he came to the forest, and through the forest to a garden. He could see the Rose-fairy, looking very faded, still leaning against the Hollyhock, and the Pansy looked very pale, and the Canterbury-bell was almost drooping to the earth.

Suddenly he stopped in his walking down the garden and listened. Over the air was coming a soft tinkle, that grew in volume

until the unmistakable sound of bells came to his ears, and there broke out on his hearing the cry of human voices :

“Peace on earth and good-will towards man.” Then he heard cheering, and he discerned that there were figures in the garden, and that no longer the girl wandered alone but there was a man with her this time. His arm was in a sling, and he was in the clothes that once had been familiar to the little Brown Man.

“Those drums are silent,” he said to himself, and then he realized. “Why !” he exclaimed, “I do believe it’s over.” In a minute he had run across the garden, and unwinding the idle fancies he opened the box of dreams and drew out his brushes. In a moment he was painting the Rose, and when he had finished he awakened the Pansy to life and revived the Hollyhock and the Canterbury-bell.

The girl and the man walked down the garden.

“It’s good to be back again,” he said softly, “now that the war is over.”

The girl's fingers touched the Rose-fairy.

"What a lovely flower!—what a lovely rose!" she whispered. "They all seem more lovely now—all of them."

Near the Pansy the little Brown Man chuckled to himself.

Slowly the man's strong fingers bent the rose's stalk, and when the flower was in his hand he held it out to the girl. "For you," he said.

"I will wear it next my heart," said the girl—"a heart that has waited all this time for you."

"It's like old times, isn't it?" said the Fairy of the rose-bush to the Hollyhock, as the two wandered away.

The Sparrow had hopped up to the Pansy. His eyes were very, very bright.

"The little Brown Man's back," he said softly.

When he had gone the Frog came out of the grass and looked up at the Hollyhock.

"Nice evening. I like the damp grass," he said.

When the Poet had finished he picked up his tattered hat and, placing it on his head, bowed to his companions of the bar.

“May I find other gentlemen of your calibre on other roads,” he said.

Then he had gone !

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MAN WHO DINED WITH THE CONTROLLER !

“ Fill up a form ! ”—the form was filled ;
“ Save up and down ! ” the walls were billed ;
Until one day the conflict ceased—
But, strange to say, the forms increased !
MARMADUKE THE MARTYR, 1927.

Izzy, McAndrew, Garge, and Terence were in the midst of an amusing discussion that evening on the question of bringing the price of a pint within reasonable distance of the working classes, when there entered the bar-parlour a most gorgeous personage. He wore a shining top-hat, a brand-new morning-coat, a pair of elegantly striped trousers, and the smartest pair of boots and spats ever seen in or out of Whitehall.

“ Good evening, gentlemen,” he said, with



"Terence"

an air of official condescension. "It grows cold."

Terence shivered. McAndrew said "Good evening."

This gorgeous personage looked about him with a sniff—noted the old roofing and the age-coloured pictures, but apparently they brought no appeal to his heart.

At that moment mine host entered to take the visitor's order, and when the dainty gin and Italians had been placed before the customer the fellow looked up.

"I note that you are men of intelligence," he said loftily. "Can you tell me, are the horse-chestnuts, walnuts, cob-nuts, fairly plentiful down here?"

"Aye, that they be, sir!" said Garge, with interest. "Maybe you be interested?"

"I am, sir," answered the individual. "I happen to be a promoter of Government Departments, and I am searching for things to control."

He let the impression of his dignified calling sink in, and then continued. "You know,"

he said, "I feel that far too many leaves are wasted."

"Might you be a Controller yourself?" asked McAndrew, searching for a loose brick in the wall.

The stranger blushed.

"No, sir," he replied, "I am only the Deputy-Controller's fifth secretary, but the Controller of Rose-leaves is my bosom friend—in the way of business, you know—and I am but now searching for some article around which I can build up some great official organization."

"Ahem!" said McAndrew.

"Yes," he continued; "nothing gives me greater pleasure than seeing the great hotel in which I work alive with sweet-faced girls and ambitious secretaries. My particular work at the present moment is to design forms for every one in the British Isles to fill in. I excel, they tell me, at that work. My last is on the question of the eyes. I am finding out how many people have brown eyes and how many blue."

"Easy job?" queried Terence.

"Passably so during the war," came the reply. "But much harder now—harder to keep—and we've made such a lot of work."

"Just as a matter of form, eh?" said McAndrew.

"As you say," came the reply. "My rise in life is interesting. Before the war I was nothing, but when war broke out I was such a fit man that my Department jumped at me. I spent my last five pounds on good clothes, and created an impression. To-day I am worth—have a cigar?" he said urbanely.

"During the war, though, things were very slack, so the Controller and myself generally whiled away the day by telling stories—just as you are doing now.

"Here is a good one.

"I heard the other day rather a good true yarn from a friend who is at the Edison Bell Gramophone Depot.

"It seems that a few years ago Dr. Clifford arranged to make a gramophone record of a sermonette, and, for that purpose, accordingly

attended at the works with a nice little sermon already prepared.

“He spoke his words into the recording instrument, but it proved rather too long for the disc.

“The recorder apologized for having to trouble the reverend gentleman and explained that the oration should take only about two and a half minutes. Would Dr. Clifford reduce his sermon accordingly?

“The doctor cheerfully consented.

“Said the recorder, ‘When the time is nearly up and there is just half a minute for the peroration, I’ll hold up my hand.’

“‘Very good,’ said the doctor, ‘I hope we’ll be more successful this time.’

“Once again the operator proceeded.

“The recorder gave the pre-arranged signal, Dr. Clifford concluded his oration, and, as he finished, he said, ‘I don’t think that will be too long.’

“Unfortunately, he spoke before the operator could lift the sound-box from the wax disc on which the doctor’s words were recorded, and part of his remarks were included.

“Consequently, when the record was tried it finished thus: ‘*And then, my dear friends, we shall all meet in Heaven. I don’t think!*’”

Izzy laughed uproariously at the joke, and would have told one himself, but the would-be Controller was talking again.

“This is a good one my Chief told me,” he said. “It is an anecdote of Lord Kitchener, who, as you know, was a bachelor. One of his staff when he was in Egypt asked for furlough so that he could get back to England to be married. Kitchener listened to him for a while, then said:

“‘Lieutenant J——, you’re not yet twenty-seven. Wait a year. If then you still desire to do this thing you shall have leave.’

“The stipulated period passed. The officer once more proffered his request.

“‘After thinking it over for twelve months you still wish to marry?’ said Kitchener.

“‘Yes, sir.’

“‘Very well, you shall have your furlough. And frankly, my boy, I scarcely thought there was so much constancy in the masculine world.’

“The subaltern marched to the door, but turned to say as he was leaving :

“ ‘Thank you, sir. Only it’s not the same woman.’ ”

“Then there was another we used to laugh over,” he went on. “This also my Chief, a rare wit, told me.

“It was at a regimental church-service during the war, and some ‘rookies’ were listening to the chaplain in church saying, ‘Let them be slain as Joshua smote the Egyptians,’ when one soldier whispered to a companion :

“ ‘Say, Bert, that old fellow is a bit off. Doesn’t he know that it was Kitchener who swiped the Egyptians ? ’ ”

The stranger was holding the board.

“And here is one I told him,” he said :

“A Captain was instructing the squad.

“ ‘Tell me, Jones,’ he said, ‘how many men are in that trench-digging party over there ? ’

“ ‘Twenty men and an officer,’ was the sharp reply.

“ ‘Quite right,’ said the Captain. ‘But how do you know that one is an officer at this distance?’

“ ‘Cos he’s the only one not working, sir.’ ”

The stranger laughed uproariously at his joke.

“ ‘Have you heard this one?’ ” put in Garge quickly, fearful lest he should miss telling his anecdote.

“ The minister was reading Sunday evening lesson from the Book of Job. ‘Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out,’ he said, ‘when all of a sudden the church was plunged in total darkness.

“ ‘Brethren,’ said the clergyman, without a moment’s pause, ‘in view of the sudden and startling fulfilment of this prophecy, we will spend a few minutes in silent prayer for the electric light company.’ ”

“ ‘Speaking of the Church,’ said the stranger, “reminds me of the rector’s wife who, availing

herself of her parochial privileges, one day during her tour of visits made inquiries which, coming from other sources, would have been thought rude.

“ ‘I suppose you carry a memento of some kind in that locket you wear?’ she said.

“ ‘Yes, ma’am,’ answered the woman addressed. ‘It is a lock of my husband’s hair.’

“ ‘But your husband is still alive!’ she exclaimed.

“ ‘Yes, ma’am, but his hair’s gone.’ ”

Terence looked up. “Some of those rector’s ladies get awkward answers,” he said.

“One there was who in strolling through the village one day came across old Farmer Barley on his way to market. Curiously enough, he did not respond to her greeting.

“ ‘Barley,’ she said indignantly, ‘you might at least doff your cap to me.’

“ ‘I beg your pardon, ma’am,’ was the reply, ‘but my poor wife ain’t dead more ’an two weeks, an’ I ain’t started looking at the wimmen yet.’ ”

McAndrew was being thawed a little by his comrades' stories, and felt he would show the peacock from the West that he knew some good ones as well.

"There were two brothers," he began, "and they were being dined by a wealthy acquaintance. As bad luck would have it, talk drifted away from the commonplace."

" 'Do you like Omar Khayyam?' said the host, trying to make conversation. The elder brother plunged heroically into the breach.

" 'Slightly,' he said, 'but I prefer Chianti.'

"Nothing more was said on this subject until the brothers were on their way home.

" 'Jack,' said the younger brother, breaking a painful silence, 'why can't you leave things that you don't understand to me? Omar Khayyam ain't a wine, you chump; it's a cheese.' "

Garge then broke in with the following.

"There was a keen-eyed mountaineer who led his lanky son into a rustic school-house.

“ ‘ This boy’s arter larnin’,’ he began. ‘ Show us yer bill of fare.’ ”

“ ‘ Our curriculum, sir,’ answered the master, ‘ takes in arithmetic, trigonometry——’ ”

“ ‘ Stop,’ said the father, ‘ the last is the thing ; feed him up well with triggerometry. He’s the worst shot in the whole blanking family.’ ”

“ He was a tramp,” began Izzy, “ and he knocked at the back door and the mistress of the mansion appeared.

“ ‘ Lady,’ he said, ‘ I was at the front——’ ”

“ ‘ You poor fellow !’ she cried. ‘ One of the conflict’s sufferers. Wait till I get you some food, and you shall tell me your experiences. You were in the dug-outs, you say ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Not in the dug-outs. I was at the front——’ ”

“ ‘ Don’t try to talk with your mouth full. Go slowly. What deed of heroism did you do at the front ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Why, I knocked, but I couldn’t make nobody hear, so I came around to the back.’ ”

“It is never wise to jump to conclusions. Always wait until the evidence is all in,” said the stranger. “Here’s another story that proves it.”

“A certain generous man met a small lad in his neighbourhood who gave evidence of having emerged but recently from a severe fight.

“‘I am grieved,’ said the old chap, ‘to see that you have a black eye, Joey.’

“Whereupon Joey replied :

“‘You go home and be sorry for your own little boy—he’s got two!’”

“It was an awkward moment for two people I know,” put in McAndrew. “They had been ‘decree nisi’d’ a little while, and she had resumed her maiden name. The dear lady of fashion, whose charity affair they happened to attend, knew nothing of these domestic incidents, and introduced the couple. The woman was the first to regain her composure.

“‘I think I have had the pleasure of meeting you once before,’ said she.

“ ‘Twice,’ corrected the man, ‘once in Hanover Square and once—er—in the Strand—er—by Temple Bar.’ ”

“ Jolly good ! I must tell the Controller of Mustard that,” said the elegant form-expert. And then :

“ A well-known comic man met a dramatic critic in Fleet Street,” he said.

“ ‘ I say,’ he said, ‘ I hear that you said in the club last night that I have no sense of humour. Now, that remark coming from you is very damaging to a man in my position. After all our years of friendship I should have imagined——’ ”

“ ‘ Here, hold on,’ said the critic. ‘ You’ve got hold of the wrong end of the stick. What I said was that you had no sense of honour.’ ”

“ ‘ Ah,’ beamed the comedian, ‘ I knew there was some mistake. Put it there, old man ! I was certain you’d never run a pal down behind his back ! ’ ”

“ Shall I tell you the pathetic story of my friend Binks ? ” murmured McAndrew.

“ Binks stood on the beach at Blackpool and gazed at his wife frolicking in the briny with disgruntled eyes. The ebony-coloured bathing-costume fitted only too well, and she—well, she was no Venus.

“ ‘ Time the family skeleton went back into the cupboard,’ he muttered savagely, and, glaring at his watch, saw with relief that the hands had arrived at the hour of midday.”

By the time the evening was well on the searcher for objects to control had thought of a great idea.

“ The very thing,” he cried ; “ I’ll do it.”

“ Do what ? ” asked Izzy, as the fellow leapt to his feet.

“ Control humour,” came the reply. “ I’ve thought of the form already.”

The next moment he had gone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AN HILARIOUS EVENING

Here you shall laugh !
Here you shall sing
Better by half,
Than joy on the wing.

ALFRED ATKINS, A.D. 470.

IN my own opinion, and I agree that the value of that opinion is not above par, the care with which I have noted the stories told at the Merrythought Inn should redound to my eternal credit as being a man modest in my desires. Modesty was ever one of my strong points, and I venture to state here that never a soul left the place any the worse for anything, save perhaps a pain from an over-indulgence in laughter.

Intoxication was rampant in the little village,

but it took the form of jokes, quips, tricks, and all the merry traffic of right good jollity.

The grey-visaged never came to the Merry-thought Inn—unless to borrow a corkscrew or spy on a genial neighbour; they remained in the black, outer world, a prey to evil humours and bitter thoughts.

A lot of this later-day cynicism and unrest can be brought to the doors of those who live unhappy lives of their own making, and consequently make others miserable as well.

Being miserable is a habit, and, if anything could be calculated to kill this vile thing, laughter is that antidote, so, my reader, take a deal of it. Let your mind run over a good story you have heard. Laugh at your thoughts, and to be sure you will make others laugh as well.

Now you must know, reader, that just near the little inn where this band of good fellows were accustomed to forgather was a little tin church.

It was one of those buildings that offends the eye of a good Catholic or a moderately

clever architect, and is very fortunate if not struck by lightning during the first fair-sized storm after its erection.

The place was constructed of corrugated iron, and once it had possessed a bell that sent out a cracked message to the faithful in such an uncertain manner that the few who answered its summons are to be congratulated rather than the majority blamed.

Just as the sun rose in the east so in the course of time the audience went west.

The mission church had discovered that it hadn't a mission, and the place lay uncared for until an enterprising individual used the little edifice as a theatre.

If the purpose was not so good, the tunefulness of the voices of actors and actresses was far in advance of the music that had once droned out to the accompaniment of a bronchial harmonium.

The place was doomed to be tinged with unhappiness, and there was not a little pathos in the companies who came down to throw rich, red melodrama at these children of the soil.

Ofttimes in the most dramatic moments of the play giggles would come from the audience, say a laugh when the hero would declaim, "See! they have set the iceberg on fire!" It was very disconcerting.

The profits from the plays were small, but the interest aroused in the district was so tremendous that a large crowd always turned up at the Merrythought Inn when "them play-actors came."

In this night of nights the low comedian of *The Midnight Express* and his confederate in liquor were seated in the bar, and the conversation turned on dramatic stories.

"Yes," said the comedian, "I was playing in a romantic drama, where a new hand was appearing in a costume affair for the first time. He had to come on and say, 'My Lord, the Duke is well' in the first act, and 'My Lord, the Duke is dead!' in the last. Well, he came on in the first act and said, 'My Lord, the Duke is dead!' The hero looked coldly at him. 'Oh, he is, is he?' he said. 'Well, you've bust the whole blinkin' play, then.'"

“ ‘Minds me,’ said his friend, “ of that same man. On the second night of a play he came in and said, ‘ My Lord, the Duke waits.’ ‘ What sayest thou, knave,’ said the hero. The new hand leered at the hero. ‘ You ‘eard,’ he said, and left the stage in a huff.”

With that the two finished their drink and hurried to dress for their different parts in the show.

“ This is a good one,” said Terence, when they had gone, and the conversation had turned on golf.

“ ‘ I am so glad to see fine golf weather at last,’ said a newly married young woman.

“ ‘ I didn’t know you cared for the game,’ said her friend.

“ ‘ I don’t. But I’ll be glad to have John playing the game again instead of staying at home talking about it.’ ”

Izzy told the next, and it had to do with a German father’s story of his children.

“It was Herr von Smutt,” said Izzy. “‘Ach! my sons, yes!’ he answered to an inquiry. ‘My first son is in the Diplomatic Service, and my second son is a fool too, my third son has got the Iron Cross, and the fourth son hasn’t been to the front either. My fifth son is carrying out Government contracts, and the sixth is in gaol as well.’”

McAndrew’s turn came. “In a slum district a Sunday-school teacher was speaking to her class about the days and the wisdom of Solomon.

“‘When Sheba’s queen came and laid gems and gorgeous apparel before Solomon, what did he say?’ she asked at last.

“One small girl, who had evidently had experience in such matters, promptly replied—

“‘Ow much do yer want for the lot?’”

“Two Scotch workmen were deliberating on the merits of the rival candidates in an election recently,” said Garge butting in now, “and one said—

“ ‘An’ as fur that McGinty, he’s no worth a damn.’ ”

“ ‘Naw,’ said the other, after a moment’s reflection. ‘Naw, unless ane wis cursin’ ony-way.’ ”

Terence was in full swing now. “A soldier lying in a hospital,” he began, “had beside him a watch of quaint and foreign design. The military medico was interested.

“ ‘Where did you get that from?’ he inquired.

“ ‘A Boche give it me,’ came the answer.

“His curiosity aroused, the doctor inquired how the enemy had come to convey this token of esteem and affection.

“ ‘’E had to,’ was the laconic reply.”

At that moment a commercial traveller spoke up.

“It was in a graveyard,” he said. “The rising sun shone brilliantly, and the dew was still on the grass.

“ ‘Ah, this is the weather that makes things

spring up,' said a passer-by cheerily to an old man seated on a gravestone.

" 'Hush,' replied the old fellow, 'I've got four wives buried here.' "

Garge smiled at the last, and told the following—

" 'You are from the country?' said a young salesman in a bookshop to a customer.

" 'Yes,' came the answer.

" 'Well, here's an essay on the rearing of calves,' said the fellow.

" 'That,' said the countryman, 'thee had better present to *thy* mother.' "

McAndrew did not mean to be outdone. "Two friends, both newly married, were comparing the merits of their wives.

" 'Ah, yes,' said Joe, who was still very much in love, 'my little woman is an angel. She couldn't tell a lie to save her life.'

" 'Lucky bounder,' said Jim sighing. 'My wife can tell a lie the minute I get it out of my mouth.' "

And so the ball was kept rolling. Terence brought down the bar with this.

"It was just after a thunderstorm, and two men were strolling down the street behind a young damsel who was lifting her skirt rather high. After an altercation as to the merits of the case, one of the men stepped forward and said, 'Pardon me, miss, but aren't you holding your skirt rather high?'

"'Haven't I a perfect right?' she snapped.

"'You certainly have, miss, and a beauty of a left,' he replied at once."

Garge retaliated. "This is a good one," he said.

"A clergyman preached several sermons from the text, 'Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever.' One morning the church bell tolled, and the minister asked the servant who was dead. The man replied that he believed it was Peter's wife's mother, as she had been sick for a long time."

McAndrew smiled. "That was circumstantial

evidence," he said. "And circumstantial evidence is not always conclusive. But there are species of it which cannot be gainsaid. In the following the policeman appears to have the best of it.

"A gentleman was charged at a West End Police Court with being drunk and disorderly. The magistrate asked him what he had to say in his defence.

" 'Not guilty, sir,' replied the accused.

" 'Where did you find the prisoner?' asked the beak of the constable who effected the arrest.

" 'In Trafalgar Square, sir,' was the Bobby's answer.

" 'And what made you think he was intoxicated?' "

" 'Well, sir, he was throwing his walking-stick into the basin of one of the fountains, and trying to entice one of the stone lions to go and fetch it out again.' "

"Two men from County Clare were working on the roof of a building one day," continued

Terence, when the laughter had subsided, "when one made a slip and tumbled to the ground; the other leaned over and called, 'Are ye dead or alive, Pat?'

" 'I'm alive,' said Pat weakly.

" 'Sure, yer such a liar I don't know whether to believe ye or not.'

" 'Well then, I must be dead,' said Pat, 'for ye would never dare call me a liar if I were alive.' "

McAndrew had a good one to follow with. "A soldier had been holding forth at some length in the railway carriage for the benefit of the crowd, among which were a few Tommies, and it happened that the conversation drifted to a well-known Cabinet Minister.

" 'There's a man, for example !' he exclaimed. 'Once a soldier, who served afterwards as a lawyer, was elected for Parliament; and yet, gentlemen, I very much doubt, were he to peg out to-morrow, whether any regimental bands would care to play the "Dead March" at his funeral !'

“ ‘Care to ?’ burst in one of the Tommies. ‘Care to ? Yer perishin’ imbecile ! Why, all of us in the Blanks would jolly well jump at the chance ! ’ ”

Then Izzy spoke up. He told this story, faithfully reproduced.

“ An old dame who had never been to the Metropolis before noticed, while searching round for lodgings, a big letter ‘D’ displayed in many windows. Not knowing its meaning, she inquired of a passing gentleman—

“ ‘Can you tell me what that letter ‘D’ means ?’

“ He looked at her for a moment, and then replied with a grin—

“ ‘That letter “D” denotes that the despairing domestics of the detached domicile are desirous that the distinguished dustman do deem it his delightful duty during his daily diversion to dislodge that disgraceful dirty dust deposited in that disgusting dusthole.’ ”

The talk turned on fighting. “My boy

Angus made a funny remark," said McAndrew. "Angus was pasting a schoolfellow last term, and in the middle of the conflict he said to his opponent, 'Stop! this fight is not fair. You're nearer to me than I am to you.' "

"Children *are* funny," put in Terence. "My sister was trying to induce a little boy to go to bed at sundown, by saying, with as much tact as she could command, that the little chickens went to roost at that time.

" 'Yes,' said he, 'but the *old hen* goes with them.' "

Then McAndrew turned to Izzy. "I'll bet you a shilling I know what you had for breakfast this morning, Izzy," he said.

"Done. Vat vas it?" asked Izzy.

"Egg," said McAndrew.

"Pay up. You're wrong." Izzy looked triumphant.

"But you've got some on your shirt now." McAndrew was confident. The bar waited.

"Vat of that? I had eggs for breakfast last Tuesday," said Izzy victoriously.

"I say, Terence," said Garge suddenly, "are you a teetotaller?"

"I don't know," replied Terence, "but I'll have a drop of Irish with you in case I'm not."

McAndrew then told a story of a profiteering couple.

"'Why d'yer want me to wear rubber 'eels like some pore devil of a clurk wot can't afford a noo pair o' boots?' a war-profiteer thundered to his better half."

"'Well, Bill,' answered the lady, as she hung her tiara on the bedpost, 'if you wore rubber 'eels on yer boots, yer wouldn't scratch them tables of ourn so much, would yer, love?'"

When the laughter had subsided Terence leant forward.

"'From the bottom o' my 'eart I pities yer,' I heard a 'bus-driver say as a final sally at the brewer's drayman, as the break-up in

the traffic block permitted him to proceed, said Terence. “ ‘It must be simply suffick awful to have a mouth for beer like your’n an’ nothin’ but empty barrels all round yer!’ ”

“Izzy,” said Terence, “reminds me of the Jew of the most pronounced type who always used to say, ‘No, my dear, I’m not a Jew, but I have a brother what’s a Jew.’ ”

Then Garge capped the evening with a gem. He had heard locally the number of village war weddings had risen to giddy heights, but, alas! the consequences of the matings were conspicuous by reason of their absence, and feeling strongly the man-power problem of the future, the vicar took to admonishing the young couples from the altar.

In course of time a pretty little war-bride presented her master with an heir, and excitement ran high at a local sewing meeting.

“ ‘Ah!’ cried a dear old spinster, ‘what did I tell you? That is all the dear vicar’s doing!’ ”

It had to be the last story, for closing-time had come, and behind the last genial back the doors of the Merrythought Inn closed, to lock out the night.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A NIGHT WITH THE "DE-MOBBED"

For we're out of khaki, smile, boys, smile,
With many a story of the march on many a
weary mile.

So let us all be merry and happy once again,
We shan't be trekking any more across the
Flanders plain.

EX-PRIVATE.

LIKE so many another little village, that
in which the Merrythought Inn lay had
welcomed back to its kindly little heart the
boys who had seen service half across the world
and were now rid of the clothes that they
had brought to honour in far-flung fields.

McAndrew, Izzy, Terence and Garge were
busy with the battledore and shuttlecock of
humour when four big strapping chaps entered
the old bar parlour.

One was from the sea, whilst the other three were from the junior service, and as they listened to the stories there were many that came to their imaginations that had been made fertile by adventure and the experience that travel brings.

One, a bright-looking son of the soil named Rogers, opened the ball when Terence had finished retailing a particularly clever Irish story.

“Reminds me,” said young Rogers, “of an incident that occurred not so many miles from here. It had to do with an accident to a lady. She was near the bank of a pond; there came a cry and a splash, followed by another splash immediately afterwards, as the gallant rescuer swam to where the damsel had disappeared under the surface of the lake. He held her as she struggled to the surface and tried to soothe her.

“‘Don’t panic, madam,’ he spluttered; ‘we are quite safe; the lake is very calm, and as clear as a mirror, and——’

“‘Well, loose my arms, then,’ said the

now comforted lady, 'and let me look into it. I think my hair is coming down.' "

"Our M.O. told me this one, Rogers," said his chum, a fair-haired chap who used to wear the uniform of the Navy. "A rare old wit was our M.O. and he was the student, so he informed us, who comes into this story.

"The Head of a well-known medical academy asked a student how much of a certain dose should be administered to the patient.

" 'A tablespoonful ! ' promptly answered the young fellow.

"In about a minute, however, he looked up and said :

" ' Professor, I would like to change my answer to that question. ' "

"The doctor took out his watch.

" ' My young friend, ' he observed gravely, ' too late ! Your patient has been dead forty seconds ! ' "

"That's a very good story," said McAndrew, leaning forward. "And this, told about two

Scotsmen at the front isn't a bad one, and may amuse you fellows who have seen so much more of the actual business than any of us have. They were two young Scotsmen in a rifle regiment who were entering the trenches for the first time, and their Colonel promised them ten shillings for every Hun they killed.

"Macdonald lay down to rest, while Campbell performed the duty of watching. Mac had not lain long when he was awakened by his chum, who was shouting :

" 'They're coming, they're coming.'

" 'Who's coming ? ' asked Mac.

" 'The Germans,' replied his mate.

" 'How many are there ? ' Mac's eyes lit up.

" 'About ten thousand,' came the excited reply.

" 'Och ! ' shouted Mac, jumping up and grabbing his rifle, 'our fortune's made.' "

" 'If I can't cap that with one like it,' said Rogers's other friend, a fellow named Clarke,

"I can tell this story that comes into my mind. I heard it from an American sergeant out yonder. Two friends, who had not met for a long while, were discussing their affairs.

" 'I understand,' said one, 'that you broke your engagement with Flossie Fairface.'

" 'No, I didn't break it,' said young Sir Galahad.

" 'Oh, she broke it?' asked his friend.

" 'No, she didn't break it,' came the reply.

" 'But it is broken?' The friend seemed puzzled.

" 'Yes. She told me what her clothes cost, and I informed her what my income was. Then our engagement sagged in the middle and gently dissolved.' "

The conversation had taken the turn of children's quaint sayings. Rogers had been mentioning the curious remarks made by Belgian children to soldiers going up the line.

"Here's a yarn about my niece," he added.

"This little girl was radiant over a recent

addition to the family, and ran out of the house to spread the news.

“ ‘Oh, ‘you don’t know what we’ve got upstairs,’ she cried.

“ ‘What is it ? ’ a neighbour asked.

“ ‘A new baby brother,’ said Nelly.

“ ‘No ! not really ? ’ the neighbour exclaimed. ‘Is he going to stay ? ’

“ ‘I think so,’ said Nelly, ‘he’s got his things off.’ ”

“ Officers have made good material for jokes out there,” said Clarke quietly. “ There was one young officer we had who was a stickler for etiquette, and this story is told against him. He was passed by a private, who omitted to salute. The officer called him back, and said sharply :

“ ‘ You did not acknowledge my rank. For this you will at once salute two hundred times.’ ”

“ At this moment a General came up.

“ ‘ What’s the matter ? ’ he exclaimed, seeing the unfortunate soldier about to begin.

“ The lieutenant explained.

" 'This ignorant fellow did not salute me, and as a punishment I am making him salute two hundred times, sir.' "

" 'Quite correct,' replied the General, smiling. 'But do not forget, sir, that upon each occasion you are to salute in return.' "

"This is pathetic, but not military," put in Izzy, when Clarke's story had been told. "I saw the incident myself, so I can vouch for it. The shop that bore the sign of the three gold balls was on fire, and among the crowd of interested onlookers was an old lady who drew much attention by her sobs and wails of despair.

" 'What's the matter with you ? ' a fireman said. 'It's not your shop, is it ? ' "

" 'No,' she cried, 'but my old man's suit is pawned there, and he don't know it.' "

"Was it your shop ? " asked Terence of Izzy, but Izzy shook his head.

"The Americans tell some good yarns," said Rogers. "Many a time over the camp

fires we've heard some really rattling fine stories. Here is a good one I came across. Rastus, the coloured man, was charged with stealing chickens. Arraigned in court, he was defending his action when the judge said:

“ ‘ You ought to have a lawyer. Where's your lawyer ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Ah ain't got no lawyer, jedge, ’ said the old man. ”

“ ‘ Very well, then, ’ said his honour, ‘ I'll assign a lawyer to defend you. ’ ”

“ ‘ Oh no, suh, no suh ! Please don't do dat ! ’ begged Rastus. ”

“ ‘ Why not ? ’ asked the judge. ‘ It won't cost you anything. Why don't you want a lawyer ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Well, your honour. Ah'll tell you, suh, ’ said the old fellow confidentially. ‘ Hit's dis way. Ah wan' tah enjoy dem chickens mahself. ’ ”

Izzy butted in again now. “ Ikey was looking very despondent, ” he began. “ That morning he left the house with ten pounds in his

pocket to try his luck at the racecourse, but alack! he had come home at nightfall foot-sore and weary, and nothing in his pocket but a bad penny. No wonder his better-half was in an evil humour.

" 'Why is it,' she said, 'that you're so unlucky at the races, and yet you always win at cards?'

" 'Well, my dear,' responded Ikey meekly, 'you see, it's this way: I don't shuffle the horses.' "

Rogers was chortling to himself. "That story of Clarke's," he began, "reminds me of another officer and an incident that occurred during a musketry lesson. This chap, a full-blown lieutenant, was endeavouring to show off his great intimacy with musketry. Lounging up to the new recruit, he murmured:

" 'Look here, my man, this thing here is a rifle, here is the barrel, there is the butt, and this is where you put the cartridge in.'

"The 'rookie' seemed to be assimilating it all, so the 'lieut,' continuing, said:

“ ‘ You put the rifle to your shoulder : these little things on the barrel are called sights ; then to fire you pull this little thing, which is called the trigger. Now, pull yourself together and remember what I have told you ; and by the way, what trade did you follow before you joined up. A collier, I suppose ! ’

“ ‘ No, sir,’ came the reply ; ‘ I only worked as a gunsmith for the Government Small Arms Factory.’ ”

“ I was up in London the other day,” said McAndrew when the laughter had subsided, “ and I had to give up my place in the car to one of a party of ladies who had entered. Every place in the car was occupied when this group of ladies got in. The conductor noticed a man who he thought sleeping.

“ ‘ Wake up,’ shouted the conductor.

“ ‘ I wasn’t asleep,’ said the passenger.

“ ‘ Not asleep ! then what did you have your eyes closed for ? ’

“ ‘ I hate to see the women standing,’ came the pathetic answer.”

Garge leaned forward. "These 'ere soldier tales are good and very good," he said. "But you find a main amount of humour even in this little village. We've had some centenarians here in our time, and I mind one day that a journalist, hearing of one of these old fellows, came down to interview him. He called at the cottage, and the first person he saw was an aged figure whom he took for his subject.

"'Naw! naw!' said the old chap, 'I'm only ninety; you want father, he's upstairs putting grandfather to bed.'"

"Vicar here has had some funny experiences," continued Garge, "but the Rector hasn't had one much more amusing than this. He went to see a parishioner. She was a charming old dame, one of the chief characters of the village, and the Rector looked admiringly at her. In spite of her ninety odd years, that calm face showed no sign of worry or anxiety.

"'My dear lady,' he asked slowly, 'what has been the main source of your vitality and

sustenance during all these years of your earthly pilgrimage? What has appealed to you as the chief basis of the wonderful vigour of your mind and body, and has been to you an unfailing help through trials and sorrows? Please tell me, that I may forward it on to others.'

"The old dame pondered a moment. The Rector thought that he would find here a good subject for a sermon. Ah, she was about to speak! She raised her eyes, dim with years, yet bright with sweet memories, and answered shortly:

" ' Victuals ! ' "

Clarke had thought of another. "Here is a story of an artist," he began. "The hopeful fellow was holding a private show of his works in his studio, secretly in the hope that he might sell one or two, and so be able to have a good meal. Selecting a seeming victim—a fat, rich-looking old gentleman—he drew him to an easel near the throne.

" 'There, sir,' he said, with an air of modest pride, 'that is my latest picture!'

"The prospective buyer raised his eye-glasses and looked at the mingled hues on the canvas, where red, black, and khaki each made a bold bid for supremacy.

" 'Er—what is it?' he asked cautiously.

" 'A battle-scene,' explained the artist coldly. 'And I have tried to express in it all the horrors of war.'

" 'Excellent!' murmured the old gentleman. 'I never saw anything more horrible in the whole of my life!'

Then Terence told a story against a lawyer, which brought forth a deal of amusing anecdotes. "A certain solicitor, always ready to lecture his office-boy, whether he deserved it or not, one day overheard a little conversation between his youth and the boy in a neighbouring office which cured him of the habit.

" 'What's your salary?' asked the other boy.

" 'I get two thousand pounds a year,' said the solicitor's lad calmly.

“ ‘Gimini!’ gasped the other. Then he put in decisively: ‘I don’t think!’

“ ‘Straight, I do! I get ten blinkin’ bob a week, and the rest in legal advice!’ ”

“ ‘Servants are funny!’ ” said McAndrew. “ ‘This servant that I am going to tell you about had a real shock the other day. Mabel, the maid in question, found her mistress; she had a little packet in her hand and a frown on her face.

“ ‘The woman next door, mum,’ she began, with contempt, ‘ ’as returned us cheaper butter than what we lent ’er.’

“ ‘Her mistress did not even look up from the book she was reading as she replied:

“ ‘That will be all right, Mabel! Just keep it in the pantry, and hand it back to her when she wants to borrow some more!’ ”

The Naval man now spoke.

“ ‘My character,’ he began, “ ‘was a sailor on a mine-sweeper, and just back on furlough.

He was feeling a bit groggy, so he called to see a doctor, who examined him thoroughly.

" ' You're troubled with your throat, you say ? ' said the medico.

" ' Aye, aye, sir,' said the sailor.

" ' Have you ever tried gargling it with salt and water ? ' "

" The A.B. groaned.

" ' I should say so,' he said, ' I've been torpedoed nine times.' "

The evening went on, with every moment bringing to light some new story that had cropped up in the mind of one of the cronies.

But time flies, and the laws are strict, and quick the moment came when the night had to be dared, when the jolly old light flickered for the last and went out and the Inn was handed over to the merry revels of the ancient spirits who frequented it.

Down the road four " de-mobbed " men were thanking their good fairies that the war was over, and that here they were back in the heart of the country and near such a generous hostelry that bred such a wealth of good fun.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LAST NIGHT

Roads are long and roads are wide,
They run to the hills where our reveries lie,
They come to the coasts where the seas divide,
They are formed from the footsteps that never
die.

ANON., 1919.

JUST as all roads have an ending, all dreams fade, or all good bottles of whisky are at last finished; so must this book come to a close.

Like you, reader, I agree that it is a great pity. With ease I could run on like the proverbial brook, but time calls a halt to all things, and if this last chapter is in the form of a farewell, the note shall be a happy one for the last night.



"1334"

Really there is not a sadness in farewell—not with the engaging characters whom we have met in these pages, for the jolly laugh of the last thing at night heralds the sun of a new morning, and these laughs may very well herald a new book, for the reader will say: “What a splendid affair!”; “We must have another book of that sort”; and so on.

The sun was a globe of red on the tip of the hill as the genial doors of the Merrythought Inn were opened to let in wayfarer and *habitué* alike to the embrace of its friendly atmosphere.

Many a pilgrim paused on seeing the old sign, and sauntered into the old bar-parlour as if conscious that this was the night of nights, and that the chronicle was being closed, just as an account is balanced and finished with.

McAndrew, Terence, Izzy, and Garge were in their accustomed places, and many another chair was filled as the evening drew on.

“Here’s a good one,” said McAndrew,

opening the ball. He launched into the following :

“The ultra well-dressed booking clerk at the great terminus, having been throughout the war an exacting conscientious objector, naturally looked down with high contempt upon a common Tommy. One day a demobilized man came to the booking office to draw one golden—or rather paper—sovereign for his greatcoat. The supercilious one accepted the coat, and handed out the note with the attitude of one who touches pitch and doesn't mean to be defiled.

“ ‘ Well, where's the receipt ? ’ asked the soldier.

“ ‘ You don't require a receipt, ’ answered the ex-conchy.

“ ‘ Oh, don't I ! ’ said the demobilized one. ‘ D'you believe in the Judgment Day ? ’

“ ‘ What has that got to do with it ? ’

“ ‘ Well, I reckon I shall be asked then for the receipt for my greatcoat, and d'you think I'm going to run all round Hell looking for you ? ’ ”

It was now Izzy's turn, and Izzy had a yarn ready all right.

"I met," he began, "an old acquaintance in the thity to-day, and he told me that he had had a thief in ith house the night before. Downstairs he went and pointed a revolver to the burglar's head.

" 'Well,' I asked, 'what happened?'

" 'Vy, he offered me ten bob for it.'

" 'But why didn't you shoot him?' I said.

" 'Shoot him?' came the surprised exclamation. 'Shoot him ven ve vos just going to have a deal. Not blinkin' well likely.' "

"I say, Izzy," said McAndrew, as he poked the fire into a blaze, "shall I tell you how to save your coal bills?"

"Yeth, rather, my boy," said the genial Hebrew, eagerly.

"Stick 'em in a scrap-book," said McAndrew, as he ducked his head to dodge the missile Izzy heaved at him playfully.

"He had you that time, Izzy," bleated Garge mirthfully.

However, Izzy got his own back.

"Look here, Mac," he said, "suppose I went into the grocer's with a bob, and came out with fifteen eggs, what would they be?"

"Go ahead," said McAndrew, "I'll buy it; what *would* they be?"

"Rotten!" retorted Izzy.

"I say, Izzy," said Garge, when the laughter over the last yarn had subsided, "I heard a new conundrum the other day. Will you fall to it?"

"Of course I vill," said the genial Izzy.

"Well," grinned Garge, "what is the difference between a Government tale and Government ale?"

"Give it up," at once quoth Izzy.

"There's no bally difference," explained Garge. "They are both too jolly thin to be any use."

"Here's a good yarn," put in Garge at last. 'A Tommy in the trenches was writing home and was not very safe in his spelling.

“ ‘I say, Joe,’ he inquired of his pal, ‘how do yer spell “appreciate”?’ ”

“Joe, who wasn’t any too sure of himself, replied testily, ‘What for do yer want to use a word like that out here. Anyhow, what have you got to appreciate, I’d like to know.’ ”

General laughter ensued, broken into finally by Terence.

“When I was in the States,” he began, “I went once into the saloon bar of one of the very swagger hotels in New York. It was one of those palaces where no dhrinks are served under twenty cents. I asked for a ‘whisky.’ ”

“ ‘No ten cent drinks here,’ snapped the bar-tender haughtily, thinking to take me down.

“ ‘Indade,’ I replied, smiling sweetly, ‘sure more’s the pity, for it’s meself that can’t dhrink that ould five cent stuff.’ ”

“Well, you certainly had the saucy bar-tender that time,” said McAndrew, as the laugh went round.

Then McAndrew followed with this one.

“Marmaduke Latewed met Antony Newpar the other day.

“Said Marmaduke, ‘Have you christened the new son yet?’

“‘No, not yet,’ replied Antony; ‘you see, neither I nor the missis have been able to agree on a suitable name. However, the neighbours call it several.’”

“The visitor to our Sunday School was recently endeavouring to cultivate an intimate acquaintance with the pupils,” said Garge.

“When he made a call the other day, he asked one smart lad:

“‘Have you any brothers and sisters?’

“‘One sister,’ replied the boy, ‘but we are soon going to have a little boy.’

“This rather staggered the surprised visitor, who gasped:

“‘Oh, indeed, and pray how do you know that?’

“‘Well, sir,’ answered the youth promptly, ‘when mother was ill in bed a little while ago we had a little girl—and now father is ill.’”

“I heard another yarn about a smart youth the other day,” began Izzy.

“‘Dad,’ he said, when he arrived home from school, ‘I saw a deaf and dumb beggar this morning, and he had an impediment in his speech.’

‘Please, Horace,’ said the father, ‘will you kindly adhere more strictly to the truth. A deaf and dumb man with an impediment in his *speech*. It’s absurd!’

“‘But really he had,’ persisted young hopeful; ‘why, he had lost one of his middle fingers.’”

McAndrew had one to cap it.

“A fair young widow attended a spiritualist seance,” he began, ‘and the spirit of ‘hubby’ was called up from the vasty deep. In due course the spirit form was manifested.

“‘Is that you, my dear loved one?’ was her first question.

“‘Yes,’ came the sepulchral reply.

“‘Are you happy, dear?’

“‘Yes, very, very happy.’

“ ‘Are you happier than when you were with me, love ? ’

“ ‘Yes, far, far happier.’

“ ‘Where are you, sweetheart ? ’

“ ‘In Hell, dearest,’ was the soft answer.”

Terence, with a twinkle in his eye, said, “How often it is that a misunderstanding occurs in consequence of wrong pronunciation. When I was last in the ould counthree a priest of my acquaintance met one of his flock.

“ ‘Top o’ the morning to you, Mrs. Murphy,’ said Father Tim.

“ ‘Good morning, your riverence,’ acknowledged the old lady.

“ ‘Sure it is indeed a pleasure to see ye,’ said the priest pleasantly, ‘and where are ye now working ? ’

“ ‘Sure I be working for Jayses,’ replied Mrs. Murphy.

“ ‘Ah, bedad, you good Christian woman. Rest the soul of yez ; it’s glad I am to learn that you are working for Holy Church.’

“ ‘No, your riverence, it’s for Jayses’ disinfectant,’ remarked Mrs. Murphy.”

Terence had remembered a good one which he told with relish.

"During the war a soldier was tried for assaulting a sergeant," he said. "He was asked by the prosecuting officer :

" 'Now, please tell us at once, without any prevarication, did you or did you not strike the sergeant ? ' "

"The prisoner cogitated for a minute, then he answered brightly :

" 'The answer is in the infirmary.' "

Terence had yet another up his sleeve.

"The fresh young bride was dreadfully nervous lest on the honeymoon her husband's Irish servant would betray the fact that he was working for a newly-married couple. So Pat was threatened with the most awful fate if the fact leaked out.

"On the first morning at the hotel, the under-chambermaid was distinctly sniffy, and inclined to flounce. On the other hand, the head waiter was familiar to the verge of impertinence, and the liftman markedly facetious.

“ ‘ Oh, I’m sure Pat has given the whole thing away ! ’ wept the little bride.

“ Pat was hauled up and put through a catechism.

“ ‘ Indeed, no, I haven’t said that ye were a honeymoon couple,’ protested the faithful servitor, indignant at the slur on his discretion. ‘ I deceived them nicely, sir. Sure, an’ I told everybody ye wouldn’t be married for three months ! ’ ”

McAndrew then gave the company a yarn that had come to mind.

“ The famous comedian was lounging about Euston Station in a state of blissful oblivion of all this workaday world and its trials,” he said. “ He subsequently frankly explained the situation to a professional friend who nobly volunteered to help him discover his train.

“ ‘ It’s like this, old chum,’ the comedian elucidated. ‘ The jolly old doctor has ordered me to go on the water wagon ; absolutely on the jolly old wagon—you follow me ? The

only thing he allows me is just a little claret—says it will do me good, or some bally rot. And I've just had eight bottles—eight bottles, I give you my word—and I don't feel a bit the better for it! ' "

"Reminds me," said Izzy, "that after a thick night a lieutenant called at his Club in the morning. As he wearily looked to see if any letters awaited him he asked the hall-porter :

" ' Was Captain O'Shaughnessy here last night ? ' "

" ' Yes, sir,' replied the hall-porter, respectfully. ' He came to the Club very intoxicated, sir.' "

" ' Well—er—but—was I with him ? ' inquired the lieutenant."

" ' There's a Cockney story that comes to my mind,' murmured Garge, when the laughter had subsided somewhat. "I call to mind an experience that came to me in London when I went up there some years ago for the Cattle Show.

“One day I walked into a fashionable-looking restaurant where I had noticed, in the window, a card announcing the important fact that one could get ‘A Good Dinner for 9d.’

“In I goes, and soon I had seated myself at a little table. Up comes a waiter fellow and offers me a kind of programme—menu, he called it, being as how it was me to be served, I suppose. He asked me if I wanted dinner, and I told him I did. Well, on the programme were about four kinds of soups—all of which I sampled. Three kinds of fish; I had the lot. Hors d’œuvres varies; I had some of the first two words and liked the varies no end. Next I had roast beef, cabbage and spuds—pudden and coffee. I tell ’ee I had a real good blow-out. Up comes the waiter fellow when I was wiping my mouth with the table-cloth, and asked me if I would like my bill.

“‘I don’t mind,’ says I.

“‘Twelve bob,’ says ’e.

“I gave him ninepence and got up to go.

“ ‘Not so fast,’ says ‘e; ‘what about the blinkin’ bill?’

“ ‘Bill!’ says I; ‘why, I’ve paid ye the ninepence.’

“ ‘I thought that was a tip,’ says ‘e. Then he called the proprietor chap, who made quite a noise. Said he’d have me run in and what not.

“ ‘I lost my temper.

“ ‘Look here!’ I exclaimed. ‘Ain’t you got in your window a card saying you give a good dinner for ninepence?’

“ ‘Yes!’ he says.

“ ‘Well,’ says I, ‘I’ve had one, and a durned good ‘un.’

“ ‘At that the proprietor Johnny laughed.

“ ‘Fancy being done by a chap of the likes of you,’ he says; and then, ‘Never mind—you go across to the shop over the road and play the stunt on them. I’ll give you three bob for doin’ it, and what’s more, you can have the grub in for nothing as well.’

“ ‘Garn!’ says I, sidling out of the shop.

‘He gave me five bob to come over here. Arternoon.’ ”

Garge winked. “There be an amazing amount of brain in the countryman, you take it from me,” he added.

General laughter ensued, and at its dying down Garge, who saw himself becoming popular, continued his narrations.

“I met old Sam, the gardener,” he said, “when I was up at the Manor this mornin’, and he had rather a comic grievance.

“He tells me that the other arternoon his master dropped a threepenny-piece in the garden, and kept old Sam searching for it the better part of the day. In Sam’s own words it was ‘cruel, confounded cruel. I’m a gardener,’ he told me, ‘not a bloomin’ treasure hunter!’ ”

Poor old Sam’s grievance provoked a laugh. Then Terence weighed in with one of his Irish yarns.

“The late Father O’Dwyer, parish priest

of Enniskerry, gave a carman who had driven him home on a wet day a glass of whisky. He begged for another glass. Father O'Dwyer, who knew that the man was too fond of spirits, refused, and, still holding the decanter in his hand, said :

“ ‘ Every glass of that you drink is a nail in your coffin.’ ”

“ ‘ Why then, your raverance,’ said the man, ‘ as you have the hammer in your hand, you might as well drive another nail into it.’ ”

McAndrew thoroughly appreciated the humour, and suggested that Terence might as well drive another nail in his coffin, only *his* would be a “ Scotch.” After the glasses had been replenished Izzy started again. Said he :

“ Right through the New Year’s dinner—from soup to nuts—a little boy had made himself a most insufferable nuisance, till at last his aunt remarked, quietly but firmly :

“ ‘ If that boy belonged to me, Mary, he should have a sound spanking.’ ”

“ ‘He deserves it, Aunt,’ bleated mother, like a fond and foolish woman that she is, ‘but I do not believe in spanking the boy on a full stomach.’

“ ‘Neither do I, but you can turn him over,’ said Aunt, acidly.”

This brought a shout of laughter. When it died down, McAndrew told the following story of some Scotch schoolboys :

“The examination was over, and the scholars were to be moved up. Two Edinburgh schoolboys were making for home.

“ ‘Who’s class are ye for, Wullie ? ’ ” said Jock.

“ ‘Lawson’s,’ said Wullie.

“Jock took a long breath. ‘Mon, but I’m sorry for ye. She’s awful strict. She makes ye wash yer ears.’ ”

Said Izzy : “That reminds me of another schoolboy story.

“A schoolmaster, asking the meaning of ‘the quick and the dead,’ a small urchin answered :

“ ‘ Please, sir, the man as gets out of the way of the motor-car is quick, and ’im as doesn’t is dead.’ ”

“ This will amuse you,” said Izzy. “ It tells of a small-part actor and the trouble he had with his one line in a costume play.”

Then Izzy declaimed, imitating a nervous mime :

He strode upon the stage and cried,
“ My Lord, the swoon has queened ! ”
And ere the laughter did subside,
He cried, “ The Sween has quonned ! ”
They dragged him off with iron hand,
As struggling then he screamed
In rasping, low, falsetto tones,
“ My Lord, the coon has sweened ! ”

This medley of mixed lines evoked great merriment, which subsided as McAndrew, with a twinkle in his eye, related the following argument :

“ A Yankee, a naturalized German, and an Irishman were discussing the boundaries of the American continent. The Yankee calculated that America is bounded on the north

by Canada, on the south by the Gulf of Mexico, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by the Pacific Ocean.

“The German gave it as his opinion that America is bounded on the north by the North Pole, on the south by the South Pole, and on the east and west by the rising and setting sun.

“The Irishman was not to be outdone.

“Said he: ‘America is bounded on the north by the Aurora Borealis, on the south by the precessing equinoxes, on the east by the Garden of Eden, and on the west by the Day of Judgment.’ ”

And thus the stories continued, as the little moments crept with cunning precision into minutes and the minutes began to move the long hand of the clock round till it was all but touching that fatal spot that heralded the time for all stories to cease in the old bar-parlour.

Away down the distant road and below, in the centuries-old foundations the ghosts

of many a larking old monk were waiting for the humans to vacate their place of pleasant foregathering so that they could come and cluster in the genial atmosphere of the place that had become almost religious through their presence and the genial nature that abounded there.

Soon, very soon the last chapter was to be finished, the last drop of ink dried on the clinging page, and the volume closed so that you, my reader, might open it to a fresh enjoyment.

Here is my pen on the last line, but before the line is finished just shake, friend, in the manner of the British, and have a last one with me ; for the time is at hand, and mine host is waiting to close the old door.

“ For Auld Lang’s Syne ! ”

THE END.



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